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1946

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
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"The Duchess Misbehaves"

The Sun

FEBRUARY 14, 1946

'The Duchess Misbehaves' Provides Long, Dreary Evening in Old Spain.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Broadway swung back into the business of play production last night with the presentation by A. P. Waxman of "The Duchess Misbehaves," the premiere of which was mercifully delayed for twenty-four hours. This new show is offered at the Adelphi. It is overpoweringly dull.

The book of Gladys Shelley is silly and tiresome; her lyrics are no better. The music of Dr. Frank Black is decidedly mediocre and only when the show is dancing—particularly when George Tapps takes over— does it show any glimmer of life. Here is another big and expensive production, gaudily costumed, and it's something to be placed in the "Nellie Bly" category. Or worse.

"The Duchess Misbehaves" is of the flashback and it's-all-in-a-dream school of musical comedy. The heavy-going libretto calls for a locale in eighteenth century Spain and it's all about a department store handy man who, having been cracked across the head by thieves making off with art treasures, dreams himself to be the painter Francisco Goya. He then goes through a series of amatory antics and wild escapades, one of which is that of making an escape astride a ferocious bull.

There are some talented people in the Adelphi's new exhibit, but they can't do much for so forlorn a show. Joey Faye, who was very funny in "Strip for Action," joined the cast just a few days ago and he tries hard, using all his tricks, as the timid department store employee suddenly transformed into a bullfighter and great lover. The droll Paula Laurence, now cast as the Queen of Spain, has a way with songs that seldom fails to enchant her night club audiences and she has proven that she ca.. be a very amusing girl in the Broadway musical shows, but her supper club material is generally far better than that afforded her in "The Duchess Misbehaves." Audrey Christie gives a brassy, combative performance as the Duchess of Alba and puts a world of energy, if not much fun, into such songs as "Katie Did in Madrid" and "I Hate Myself in the Morning." Penny Edwards is pretty and spirited. Jean Handzlik created something of a first-night tumult with a bewildering number called "Lost." Larry Douglas sings well enough. But of the performers it is George Tapps, who staged the dances, who comes off best.

Waxman, producer of "The Duchess Misbehaves," was previously represented by the ambitious but ill-fated "Sadie Thompson." I suggest that he try his luck sometime with a four-character comedy and with one setting. Far more sorcery is needed than the authors have displayed to make anything of the Adelphi's new production.

'THE DUCHESS MISBEHAVES.'

Musical comedy with book and lyrics by Gladys Shelley; music by Dr. Frank Black; staged by Martin Manulis; musical numbers by George Tapps; production designed by A. A. Ostrander; additional dialogue by Joe Bigelow; costumes by Willa Kim; lighting by Carlton Winckler; musical director, Charles Sanford; presented by A. P. Waxman at the Adelphi Theater, Wednesday evening, February 13, 1946. The cast:

Woman	Grace Hayle
Franchot	Buddy Ferraro
First Sister	Elena Boyd
Second Sister	Mildred Boyd
Third Sister	Edith Boyd
Butterfly	Penny Edwards
Paul	Larry Douglas
Fitzgerald	James MacColl
Woonsocket	Joey Faye
First Girl	Gail Adams
Second Girl	Ethel Madson
Miss Kiester	Paula Laurence
Crystal Shalimar	Audrey Christie
Reporter	Al Downing
Neville Goldglitter	Philip Tonge
Pablo	Larry Douglas
Amber	Grace Hayle
Goya	Joey Faye
Model	Joanne Jaap
Roberto	James MacColl
Duchess of Alba	Audrey Christie
Mariposa	Penny Edwards
Barber	Paul Martin
Manicurist	Joanne Jaap
Tailor	Ken Martin
Assistant Tailor	Bernie Williams
Messenger	Buddy Ferraro
First Student	Victor Clark
Second Student	Jean Randolph
Duke of Alba	Philip Tonge
Ladies in Waiting	The Boyd Triplets
Queen of Spain	Paula Laurence
A Model	Norma Kohane
Matador	George Tapps
Jose	Al Downing
Dancer	Mata Monterio
The Woman	Jean Handzlik
Her Man	George Tapps
Magician	Ken Martin
Assistant Magician	Buddy Ferraro

It provides a long and dreary evening in old, old Spain.

Journal American

FEBRUARY 14, 1946

'Duchess Misbehaves' Opens at the Adelphi

By ROBERT GARLAND

If, last night in 54th st., some one had formed a Bring "Nellie Bly' Back to the Adelphi Club," he could have had me as charter member. For the fact is that, as "The Duchess Misbehaves" goes its smeary way from Carlton's Department Store in 20th century America to Goya's Studio in 18th century Spain and back to Carlton's Department Store again, the Victor Moore-William Gaxton fiasco seems not so bad.

This gives you some idea.

Even if it doesn't, programs at the Adelphi refer to the show as a "frolicsome musical comedy." Now, according to my dictionary, "frolicsome" means "full of gayety," "musical" means "full of melody," and "comedy" means "full of fun." And "The Duchess Misbehaves" has none of these. To the contrary Even I, who outstayed the majority of my fellows, found only melancholy, dissonance and ennui.

No gayety, no melody, no fun.

You'll agree after sitting through the prologue, two acts and epilogue made up by Gladys Shelley out of her own erudition, set to music by Frank Black and acted by Audrey Christie, Paula Laurence and Joey Faye against backgrounds by A. A. Ostrander in costumes by Willa Kim. You'll say they're neither gay, melodic nor funny, wondering why A. P. Waxman ever brought the misbehaving duchess to town.

He, too, must be uncertain.

* * *

Guy Called Goya

As was true of "A Connecticut Yankee," "One Touch of Venus" and the countless likes of them, "The Duchess Misbehaves" is a song-and-dance concoction in which a leading character must be conked into unconsciousness before the narrative gets rightfully under way. At the Adelphi the leading character is the guy called Woonsocket who, conked into unconsciousness, becomes the guy called Goya.

This consumes the prologue.

Once Mr. Woonsocket becomes Signor Goya, once 20th century America becomes 18th century Spain, once Carlton's Department Store becomes Madrid's Public Square, the dubious duchess is all set to misbehave. And misbehave she does, cutting-up, carrying-on and acting for all the world as if Paul Moss had never been heard of. With her tongue in Gladys Shelley's cheek, she also sings.

Songs no mother taught her.

In her double-entendre, which is no more "double" than I am, the former Crystal Shalimar, now the Duchess of Alba, is encouraged by the Queen of Spain, her Ladies in Waiting, the guy called Goya, and a couple of other fellows whose names escape me. They all say one thing and mean no other. And you, listening-in, looking-on, hope they'll soon come up for air.

Sex is its own suffocation.

* * *

Immodest Model

It's its own suffocation in "The Duchess Misbehaves," where the cast works obediently with the librettist. Audrey Christie is the strip-tease duchess of her day, the immodest model of one of Goya's most celebrated paintings. And, lifting up her voice, she chants of how she hates herself in the morning and of what Katie did in Old Madrid. "Nuts" is another number.

So much for the Duchess.

The Queen, in the person of Paula Laurence, is always just around the lee side of a leer to take up where the Duchess left off. Miss Laurence sings about men, honeymoons and nightmares. She and I both like her own material better. Joey Faye brings his night club technique to the Mr. Woonsocket who is conked into Signor Goya. He should have stood in Leon and Eddie's.

So it goes all evening.

George Tapps, a dance director, bills himself beyond all reason in the Matador number to De Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance" music. Larry Douglas, as the Paul who becomes a Pablo, delivers "My Only Romance," "Couldn't Be More In Love" and "Fair Weather Friends" with the Penny Edwards who sings way down in her windpipe. What's left is equally undistinguished, uncalled for and untidy...

Come back, "Nellie Bly." You are forgiven.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 14, 1946

'The Duchess Misbehaves' Opens at the Adelphi

By VERNON RICE

Misfortune has befallen the musical "The Duchess Misbehaves" almost since its inception. Last night, however, it had its greatest misfortune. It opened at the Adelphi.

Just for the records let it be said that it is a musical comedy in which a timid little sign painter in a department store is knocked out by some thieves who are stealing the valuable Goya painting of the Duchess of Alba. The one in which she is nude, of course.

He has a dream during his unconscious period, which goes on for most of the first act and all of the second, in which he dreams that he is Goya and that Crystal Shalimar, his dream girl in life, becomes his dream girl in the dream and the Duchess as well.

A lot of other people figure in the subconscious plot. They include the Queen of Spain, the Duke of Alba and ever so many others.

A. P. Waxman produced the piece. The sets and costumes looked costly, the cast, which included Audrey Christie, George Tapps, Paula Laurence and Joey Faye, worked hard at something that came to naught. Dr. Frank Black, a distinguished musician, composed a score which was little different from the rest of the show, while Gladys Shelley wrote about as unsubtle and distasteful book and lyrics as heard this season.

In the spirit of the show's bum jokes, I say, it will Goya way soon.

****

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 14, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'The Duchess Misbehaves' Just Drearily Lewd

I should prefer to cloak with the wings of charity the flagrant aesthetic misdemeanor committed on the stage of the Adelphi last night, pretend it didn't happen and say nothing about it. But my job does not permit me to do this.

Therefore, I am obliged to say that "The Duchess Misbehaves," which is described on the program as a musical comedy, seemed to me much more like a series of 12 filthy pictures in kodachrome and on the gyp side at that, for the dirt is mainly vocal. The principals and ensemble are even more draped than musical comedy requires.

The burlesque shows which used to be presented 20-odd years ago at the National Winter Garden on Houston St. and at the Irving Place Theater were models of almost Shakespearean wit, invention, taste, dancing, music and showmanship in comparison with that of the book, lyrics, dialog and over-all production of "The Duchess Misbehaves."

The book tells of an imbecile attendant in the art gallery of a department store (Joey Faye) who is knocked unconscious by robbers who make away with Goya's portraits of the "Young Girl," nude, and the "Young Girl," dressed; and of his dream that he is the famous Goya he has heard the guides talk about—the great Spanish court painter, allegedly a man of many mistresses, including the Duchess of Alba.

Something might have been made of this theme, something exhilarating, amusing and romantic. The begettors of "The Duchess Misbehaves" have merely smeared the Goya legend in a particularly offensive manner.

Inasmuch as in the cast there are some artists whose work I admire I do not wish to point up the fact that they are in the thing or intimate what they are required to do. If you are morbid, you will find their names in the cast box. I can mention two names with satisfaction — that of Don Walker, who did the orchestrations, and Charles Sanford, who conducted the orchestra. Between the two of them, they cooked up a medley overture which misled me into believing there was some nice music forthcoming. I find that I cannot even mention some of the titles of the songs in a family newspaper.

****

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 14, 1946

'Duchess Misbehaves' Turns Out To Be Only Simple Misdemeanor

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The miserable duty of this morning's dispatch is to report that "The Duchess Misbehaves," a musical which opened last night at the Adelphi Theatre, is more a misdemeanor than a misbehavior and should be let off with a two-dollar fine on complaint of the Department of Sanitation.

The duty is miserable, as always, because quite a few people work hard to put the thing across, and there are one or two nice items in it like the opening scene of the second act—a public square in Madrid whose affairs are musically illustrated by Frank Black—and a song, "Lost," which is reminiscent in staging and melodic effect of the "Body and Soul" number Libby Holman and Clifton Webb did many years ago.

One of those who works hardest and to best effect is Joey Faye, a meek little comedian with a burlesquer's sneeze who assumed his role on a few day's notice. Faye is a funny man—funny to see, funny to watch and funny to listen to when he has some jokes. His trouble was, he didn't have many jokes last night and the songs alloted him were the kind of dirt that makes you shudder rather than laugh. Considering the handicaps imposed upon him, he does fine.

The story opens at a department store art exhibit, then switches for most of the evening to Eighteenth Century Spain, where the dirty talk is about how the Duchess of Alba has been posing in the nude for Francisco Goya. It being Mr. Faye's dream, Joey is Goya, and Audrey Christie is the Duchess. Miss Christie does bumps and grinds, cavorts like Betty Hutton and does all she can to make things lively.

Those Two Topics.

The author of book and lyrics, Gladys Shelley, is exclusively but not very brightly concerned with only two subjects, nudity and sex. A sample lyric rhymes "anguish" with "language"—and I just languish.

Except for the "Lost" song, a second-act overture and the picture music for the market scene, I was disappointed in Frank Black's score, which seemed rhythmically outdated and not very memorable as to tunes. The "Lost" number, a torch song, has nothing to do with the show, either. All of a sudden a woman one hasn't laid eyes on before comes out and somebody asks hasn't her man come back yet and she bursts into her lament. Jean Handzlik, a female baritone, gives this number the waterworks while George Tapps dances around as her faithless fella.

Mr. Tapps also does some of his notable tapping, including a two-footed illustration of De Falla's "Fire Dance" which is quite an exercise, if not art. Paula Lawrence plays the Queen—to switch an old, old critical joke—as though she were stuck with it in a game of gin rummy. It's not her fault, though. She can be funny when she has funny lines but Miss Shelley forgot to give her any.

A. A. Ostrander's settings are all right without knocking anybody's eye out, and some of the girls are pretty good looking.

"The Duchess Misbehaves"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 14, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Goya With a Dirty Brush

FROLICSOME is the word the sponsors use to describe "The Duchess Misbehaves," which has come to the Adelphi. The adjective might be applied to a three-legged elephant, but it would be quite as inept. The truth is that the new musical comedy which tries to celebrate a liaison between Goya and the Duchess of Alba is so lacking in wit, charm and musical eloquence that it is a crashing bore. Despite the presence of several professional and assured performers and an adequately expensive production, the show is both tasteless and turgid. The lyrics rhyme spouse with louse; the libretto is as disconnected as a cross-word puzzle, and the music is only worthy of attention when a piece of Manuel De Falla is being played. Unfortunately, De Falla did not write the score.

* * *

It would seem to be a simple theorem that a musical comedy should have tunes, humor and showmanship. Most of these qualities are sadly lacking in this A. P. Waxman production. Gladys Shelley may have done extensive research on Goya's infatuation for a noblewoman, which tempted him to paint her in the nude, but her book does not make the project seem like anything more than a waste of time. There are scenes of supposed nonsense in Madrid, tied none too cleverly into a contemporary yarn, but they would have been tossed out of a Minsky show when burlesque was still a local branch of the entertainment industry. The words which she has written for Dr. Frank Black's melodies do not beggar them by any means, but they do not add to the gayety of the proceedings.

* * *

With this desperate dearth of decent material the players act gallantly, if to little avail. Paula Laurence is on hand as the Queen of Spain, trying her best to give wry inflections to lines which are forever falling with a dull thud. Jean Handzlik makes the most of a torch song which would have graced a Negro caper better than "The Duchess Misbehaves," and Audrey Christie practically knocks herself out as the errant duchess. Joey Faye plays the Goya role with burlesque emphasis but a minimum of fun, and George Tapps contributes pretentious terpsichorean interludes to an entertainment which has no more bounce than a croquet ball.

* * *

There are other unfortunates involved in "The Duchess Misbehaves." On the acting side, one might cite James MacColl, Penny Edwards, Larry Douglas and an anomolous trio known as the Boyd Triplets, although there is scant distinction in the mention of their names. Willa Kim has designed the costumes in a weird combination of colors and period apparel and Chet O'Brien is responsible for what staging one may detect at the Adelphi. If "The Duchess Misbehaves" is frolicsome, I'll take a steam-shovel.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 14, 1946

Grim Goya

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Another musical has come to town, dragging its book like a tin can tied to the tail of a cat. This one is "The Duchess Misbehaves," and the long-suffering Adelphi again is playing host to assorted vicissitudes. Gladys Shelley has reached down to some lower shelf for a story about Goya, and she and/or others have reached still lower for the embellishing jokes. Dr. Frank Black has composed a score which probably would be harmless, at least, if someone had troubled to write lyrics. A group of luckless players, with talent built and reputations earned in earlier wars, find themselves completely defeated. It is odd to think that an entire company may be miscast, but it seems quite logical under the circumstances. "The Duchess Misbehaves" is like that.

* * *

In case the moving fingers of the recording angels care a great deal, the story is about a man who is hit over the head at an art exhibition and dreams he is Goya, artist and ladies' man. One of the truly magnificent moments of the musical, a moment that stretches into hours, is Goya's search for a model with a mole on the hip. It seems the husband of a nude is annoyed, and the artist must ring in a substitute to persuade him his wife hadn't been posing. There is more difference between "The Duchess Misbehaves" and "Oklahoma!" than lies between "a model with a mole on the hip" and "the surrey with the fringe on top," but that is at least one sizable distinction. There are a good many others. Such jokes, such goings on. After a time the book does arouse a certain macabre interest, but probably that isn't the best theatre.

As Goya, Joey Faye is having a rather fearful time. He entered the cast late, but probably would be no better off had he started with the rest. Normally he is a funny person composed of animal and bird noises and quiet misbehaviors. In "The Duchess Misbehaves" he tells one joke after another, only to hear them drop with the solid ring of a falling pancake. The fault is not his. Paula Lawrence also has a vicious talent for caricature; likely she is just too sophisticated for current events. Audrey Christie, as the duchess, is all over the place, and it can be said in her favor that at least she adds energy. George Tapps, as choregrapher and chief dancer, is good in the simple phases of tapping by himself, and designing simple group steps, but not so when he and they try to go beyond.

A. P. Waxman, the producer, obviously has spent considerable money in getting the musical to the stage. It is well dressed, with costumes by Willa Kim and settings by A. A. Ostrander, and the chorus is large and attractive. Martin Manulis is credited with the direction, which is slow and which allows each singer to face the audience, do his bit and then invite applause as on prize day. Of Dr. Black's music, a number called "Katie Did in Madrid" is fair enough in the mood of "Eadie Was a Lady," and one called "Lost" is in the haunting style of "Bill." "I Hate Myself in the Morning" would be better with less obvious lyrics, and "Couldn't Be More in Love" is all right as a stock tune on a well-known subject. But the rays of light, as of hope, are pretty slender for "The Duchess Misbehaves."

PM

FEBRUARY 15, 1946

Horror Reigns At the Adelphi

PM Reviews

Kicking its 18th-century heels on West 54th Street is one of the most maddening musicals of the decade. Why only the Duchess has been singled out for misbehaving, I will never know. Throughout a spacious evening there is a general plot afoot—a plot about Goya—to make everybody in the audience go quietly, or perhaps shriekingly, off his chump. I don't too much mind being bored in a genteel way. I can decently suffer through an "experiment" or watch with regret any fairly well-laid plans going horribly agley. But far from its doing anything, I can't conceive what *The Duchess Misbehaves* was even trying to do. It is all a noisy and witless mess—abysmal book, anemic tunes, schoolboy lyrics, absurdly pretentious dancing—and a shocking waste of several competent performers' time.

We approach the age and atelier of Goya through the sparkling device of having a dopey present-day painter bopped on the head at an art exhibition. The rest is what he dreams. As Goya, he gets enmeshed with the carnal Duchess of Alba and, after painting her in the nude, with the Duchess' excitable husband. This being a high-toned and high-spiced affair, Goya also gets disastrously involved with the Queen of Spain, who sentences him to fight a particularly savage bull. So the show goes on in its royal and ribald fashion, the leaden jokes piling up on the Adelphi stage until it would take ten husky stevedores to lug them away.

Joey Faye, leaping into the part at the very last minute, and not looking before he leaped, performs as Goya. He was letter-perfect in his lines on opening night, which was possibly a mistake. Mr. Faye can be funny given a chance, but he is never given half a one, and so marches to his doom. Everybody else is part of the procession to the scaffold— Paula Laurence, who as the Queen of Spain does all she can with Miss Shelley's dialogue and lyrics, and Audrey Christie, who, as the Duchess, carries on like five or six fire engines. Dr. Frank Black's score, by being no worse than utterly commonplace, is one of the least indictable things in the show. George Tapps has arranged the dances as well as done most of the dancing. Except for an unengaging stiffness, he is skilful enough at tap and plain Broadway routines; but he has gone in for some of the most rubbishy fancy work including something to go with De Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*, that the theater has witnessed in a long time. It's particularly insane in view of Miss Shelley's tormentingly broad and lowdown libretto.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER.

"Lute Song"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 7, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

In Excellent Tune

A CHINESE classic has come to the Plymouth to engender a rare theatrical excitement. "Lute Song" is mannered, as any Oriental drama which has been playing for some 500 years should be, but it has bounce and exquisite pageantry on Broadway. The late Sidney Howard and Will Irwin have accomplished a labor of affection and showmanship in adapting the original "Pi-Pa-Ki" to contemporary tastes. Robert Edmond Jones has designed it in tableaux of great beauty and Raymond Scott has contrived some haunting melodies to grace the action. With Mary Martin leading a captivating dignity to the chief role of a bereft and faithful wife, this Michael Myerberg production is a fascinating fantasy.

* * *

The fantasy is a bit top-heavy in the early stanzas of the piece as the ambitious Tsai-Yong leaves his family in a provincial village to become chief magistrate in the capital of the Middle Kingdom. When the show turns to straight human drama in the second act, it quickens magnificently. The scenes in which Miss Martin, playing Tchaou-ou-Niang, tries to save her husband's parents from a famine and sets off on a dutiful pilgrimage to the Imperial Preceptor's palace to find her neglectful spouse, are instinct with feeling as well as color. Her radiant portrayal gives one more than a clew to the fact that "Pi-Pa-Ki" has been a smash hit for centuries.

* * *

Miss Martin has been unofficially designated a pillar of the theater. She is a lovely support to what might easily have proved more of a stunt than a valid piece of theater. She sings several songs with lyrical eloquence, particularly the Scott number called "Mountain High, Valley Low," but she also acts with superb authority. Through all the ceremonial conventions of the offering comes the quiet emotional force of a fine performer bringing understanding to a part which can be understood by local playgoers quite as well as by Chinamen. Meanwhile, she participates in the set tableaus with complete assurance, making a funeral march one of the bright moments of the current theater.

* * *

Yul Brynner has the awkward assignment of the errant son and husband who finds himself married to his boss's daughter while his real family is starving to death. He does about as well as could be expected with the shadowy villain. Augustin Duncan and Mildred Dunnock are excellent as the parents who grow to love their daughter-in-law more than their son, and McKay Morris is splendidly autocratic as the prince. Helen Craig has moments of considerable poignance as the lady of high birth who wants Tsai-Yong to be reunited with his ever-faithful wife, and Clarence Derwent adds comic accents as interlocutor and manager. The dances devised by Yeichi Nimura are exciting; John Houseman's staging is meticulous, and Valentina's costumes fit the mood of the show perfectly. "Lute Song" is what biologically might be called a sport among Broadway attractions, but it is rich in entertainment.

****

"LUTE SONG," a love story with music by Sidney Howard and Will Irwin, based on the Chinese play "Pi-Pa-Ki," with music by Raymond Scott and lyrics by Bernard Hanighen, scenery and costumes by Robert Edmond Jones, directed by John Houseman and presented by Michael Myerberg at the Plymouth Theater with the following cast:

The Manager The Honorable Tchang	Clarence Derwent
Tsai-Yong, the Husband	Yul Brynner
First Property Man	Albert Vecchio
Second Property Man	Leslie Rhoinfeld
Tsai, the Father	Augustin Duncan
Madame Tsai, the Mother	Mildred Dunnock
Tchao-ou-Niang, the Wife	Mary Martin
Prince Niaou, the Imperial Preceptor	McKay Morris
Princess Niaou-Chi, His Daughter	Helen Craig
Si-Tchun, a Lady in Waiting	Nancy Davis
Waiting Women	Pamela Wilde, Sydelle Bylovna
Hand Maidens	Blanche Zohar, Mary Ann Reeve
Youen-Kong, the Steward	Rex O'Malley
A Marriage Broker	Diane de Breti
A Messenger	Jack Amoroso
The Imperial Chamberlain	Ralph Clanton
The Food Commissioner	Gene Galvin
First Clerk	Max Leavitt
Second Clerk	Bob Turner
First Applicant	Tom Emlyn Williams
Second Applicant	Michael Blair
Imperial Guards	John Robert Lloyd, John High
Imperial Attendants	Gordon Showalter, Ronald Fletcher
The Genie	Ralph Clanton
The White Tiger	Lisa Maslova
The Ape	Lisan Kay
Phoenix	Lisa Maslova, Lisan Kay
Li-Wang	Max Leavitt
Priest of Amida Buddha	Tom Emlyn Williams
A Bonze	Gene Galvin
Two Lesser Bonzes	Leslie Rhoinfeld, Joseph Camicia
A Rich Man	Bob Turner
A Merchant	John High
A Little Boy	Donald Rose
The Lion	Walter Stane, Alberto Vecchio
A Little Boy	Donald Rose
Children	Mary Ann Reeve, Blanche Zohar, Teddy Rose
A Secretary	Michael Blair

PM Exclusive

FEBRUARY 8, 1946

—Kronenberger—

Much to Enjoy, But Not Enough

PM Reviews

In *Lute Song* – which stars Mary Martin – Will Irwin and the late Sidney Howard have adapted a famous, 500-year-old Chinese play called *Pi-Pa-Ki*. Their version has been a long time in reaching Broadway; it is not hard to understand why. For the script, in terms of production, offers a pretty formidable challenge. There is at once an artistic problem of style and a more straightforward problem of story-telling. The two problems, moreover, often confront and even menace each other. An old, old tale which in the original is no doubt buttressed by finely wrought traditions must work out, in our language and on our stage, a new kind of salvation.

I'm afraid it has not quite done so. *Lute Song* lacks the inner excellence of art, and the full impact of theater. It has chosen in the end, to cover up a little; to dazzle and distract us; to offer gorgeous compensations; to substitute—too often—the exotic for the universal. *Lute Song* is as much pageantry as story; and if there was not to be less pageantry, there had better have been more. With its music and dancing, *Lute Song* could have been worked into a kind of magnificently pictorial ballet. As it stands, a very human story has been checked in its flow and drained of some of its poignancy; has been reduced, on however high a level, to something not unlike a libretto. The story must walk among eggs to begin with, since it calls for delicately stylized treatment, for something that catches the Chinese manner of expressing movement and emotion. To what extent all this is "translatable"—either in words or in acting—I do not know; but it is obviously not easy. So far as the writing goes, it approximates (though it never quite achieves) both the sought-after simple style and the sought-after formal style. In brief, it serves. As for the acting, the cast is generally proficient enough in its own way, and not to be harshly judged in its simulation of an alien style; but it does not catch the true magic of that style.

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Yet if *Lute Song* must be held to fall short, it is at least from aiming high. And for that matter, it falls short more attractively than anything else produced this season. It does, indeed, have its gorgeous compensations—and a few homelier ones. Robert Edmond Jones has done a very fine job; his sets and, even more, his costumes are imaginative and beautiful, and they have been woven into a general pageant of movement and tableau. Outstanding are an Imperial March, for which Raymond Scott has provided an intoxicating tune; and a suddenly opening heavenly vista of rows of robed, masked figures. Yeichi Nimura's dances I cared less for, though the best of them are interesting. Mr. Scott's music is also not of a piece, but I liked some of the dance music, and two of the songs written for Mary Martin, *Monkey See, Monkey Do* and *Mountain High, Valley Low*.

As for the story, the pity is that it has been submerged and broken up, and so is not dramatic or affecting enough. For I think it could have been; and as it was, I found little of it actually dull, and moments of it touching. It is a tale of a provincial young scholar who, leaving his wife and parents at home, goes out into the world to make a name, becomes a great magistrate, and is forced by a prince's edict to marry a prince's daughter. He is prevented from helping his family: the parents die during a famine, the deeply faithful wife becomes a mendicant nun and is at last restored to her husband by the princess—in a sort of No. 2 Wife's role. Through the tale run all the eternal emotions—love, grief, suffering, fidelity, guilt—and moments of not very robust humor.

* * *

In the not over-large part of the faithful wife, Mary Martin has much of her personal attractiveness, and a certain delicacy. I do not think the part best suits her talents, but she sustains it. As the husband, Yul Brynner has looks and grace, but he is not much of an actor, and is not up to the dramatic demands of the play's most important role. Helen Craig has dignity as the princess, and Augustin Duncan and Mildred Dunnock make satisfactory parents. McKay Morris, cast as the princess' cynical, autocratic father, maintains a Gilbert & Sullivan air; and Clarence Derwent is suitably smooth and arch as the Manager, or narrator.

I suspect that there will be very wide-ranging opinions about *Lute Song*. Though I cannot recommend it as a success, it is something that any one who cares for what is unusual in the theater should see for himself. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 7, 1946

'Lute Song' Stars Mary Martin at Plymouth in an Unusual Romance With Music—Robert Edmond Jones' Sets Unique

By LEWIS NICHOLS

No one honestly could deny that as a piece for the theatre "Lute Song" has many and distinctive virtues. Based on a Chinese classic, its story is far removed from the product of Broadway's usual loom. To it has been given a production from which nothing has been spared, with Robert Edmond Jones' designs and costumes setting a mark that will not soon be equaled. It has moments of pageantry that are exciting and moments of simplicity that are real. But, nevertheless, the sum of its virtues does not quite make up the greater virtue, that of offering a fully satisfactory time at the theatre. "Lute Song" does not sing in a tone quite lyrical enough; its intentions are more worthy than their fulfillment is complete.

The reason is, perhaps, that "Lute Song" is a mixture of various styles of treatment. In going back to the Chinese "Pi-Pa-Ki," Will Irwin and the late Sidney Howard made their treatment in the simple vein of the original story. In setting in the background, Mr. Jones has done a masterful duty, but the costumes and the scenery are alien to the simplicity of the tale. In composing the score for the play, Raymond Scott has taken yet another mood; his tunes are modern, from the twentieth century. Each of the three basic contributors also has divided his offerings on occasion. For example, most of the characters speak in an inartificial way, save one who delivers epigrams after the manner of "The Mikado." The parts of "Lute Song" lack blending; the total effect is of jumpiness.

The story is leisurely told. It is of a young husband who leaves home to take examinations in the capital, and there is forced to marry again, this time to the daughter of a prince. Back home, his parents die through famine, and his first wife, despairing of his return, goes to a nunnery. The pair are united through the offices of the second wife. As it is told in "Lute Song," the tale is interrupted for songs, mainly sung by Mary Martin, and for moments of pageant and dancing. When it is just a story, the tale is so leisurely as to drag, but the chances are it might not if told by itself in the simple way of the original. The interruptions, good as they sometimes are, set a different mood.

Mr. Jones' settings, costumes and lighting are the heroes of the evening. They are worked out in great detail, each one blending into the other. Mr. Scott's music is perhaps not outstanding, although at least one number—"Monkey See, Monkey Do"—has a charm of its own. As the girl, Miss Martin has a difficult part, and on the whole she does it well. Her songs are not of the type with which her reputation was built; she does not try to make them so. Yul Brynner is the luckless husband and gives a satisfactory performance. Clarence Derwent plays a part as well as acting the announcer, and Augustin Duncan gives a touching picture of the elderly father. McKay Morris is the prince given to epigrams, Mildred Dunnock, the boy's mother, Rex O'Malley a steward. John Houseman directed, Yeichi Nimura designed the dances, and Michael Myerberg is the stalwart who went off the beaten track to find and produce "Lute Song."

Journal American

FEBRUARY 7, 1946

'Lute Song' Opens At the Plymouth

By ROBERT GARLAND

Michael Myerberg, known, among other things, as The Great Chance-Taker, has stuck out his pocketbook again. This time, he has revived Kao-Tong-Kia's "Pi-Pa-Ki" on Broadway. Now, all of five-and-a-half centuries after its initial presentation, you will find it at the Plymouth in a free, if not exactly easy, adaptation by the Will Irwin who is quick and the Sidney Howard who is dead.

The Great Chance-Taker who has been publicized as "gaunt and white-faced", the theatrical adventurer who says he "beats his brains and heart out" each time he does a play, the Broadway benefactor who, to take him at his word, spent $185,000 on "Pi-Pa-Ki" before he raised a curtain in 45th Street, can relax now on his laurels. The old Chinese classic never looked lovelier!

For the Robert Edmond Jones who began his illustrious career by dressing up Granville Barker's reproduction of Anatole France's "The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife" has, after three decades, brought that illustrious career to a fitting climax by dressing up Michael Myerberg's reproduction of Lao-Tong-Kia's "Pi-Pa-Ki". His scenery, his costumes and his his lighting are superb.

In spite of the complementary contributions of John Houseman as director, Raymond Scott as composer, Yeichi Nimura as choreographer and Mary Martin as star, "Pi-Pa-Ki," translated into "Lute Song", is a decorator's show. Robert Edmond Jones's!

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Same Old Story

As currently diked out by Mr. Jones; currently put on by Mr. Houseman; currently acted up by Miss Martin, currently financed by Mr. Myerberg and currently removed from Chinese into English, the "Pi-Pa-Ki" on view as "Lute Song" tells the same old story it used to tell in 14th Century China and, centuries later, in the Celestial showshops of London, New York and San Francisco.

The story is that of Tchao-Ou-Niang, the wife; Tsai-Yong, the husband; Nieou-Chi, the princess, and the old Chinese customers who worked in and out of their three-sided love affair. Boy meets Girl, and marries her. Princess meets Boy, and marries him. Girl meets Princess, and they divide the Boy between them. I think they do as the Plymouth's falling curtain brings Broadway back again.

Now, in the 20th Century, as then, in the 14th, the triangular narrative of The Wife, The Husband and The Princess is further complicated by the interference of mothers, fathers, brokers, princes, buddhas, bonzes, guards, attendants, beggars, stewards and all the quaint and curious characters with which the Asiatic drama is traditionally afflicted. Long suffering, these Chinese!

But when their suffering grows too long for us non-Chinese to bear, we can look at Robert Edmond Jones' scenery and costumes, listen to Mary Martin's songs and sayings, or give ear and eye to Miss Martin's fellow players. These, too, are worthy of our best attentions.

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Jones and Martin

It is the lovely lady with a touch of Venus to whom "Lute Song" is dedicated at the Plymouth. Play, players and production belong to Mary Martin, just as Mary Martin's heart belonged to daddy. Mary is the heroine who is more sinned against than usual. Mary is the heroine who sings all of Raymond Scott's songs. Mary is the heroine who suffers prettily in more than Oriental splendor.

A truly distinguished cast helps out. Yul Brynner, with Chinese blood and background, is a pictorial Tsai-Yong. Augustin Duncan is a natural born patriarch as Tsai, the Elder. McKay Morris is a nicely anachronistic Prince Nieou. Helen Craig is beautifully articulate as Princess Nieou-Chi, after being beautifully dumb in "Johnny Belinda." Rex O'Malley is Rex O'Malley in Chinese dress.

Raymond Scott, who has orchestrated his sufficently Celestial score, provides Miss Martin with "Monkey See, Monkey Do" and "Where Are You?" to sing alone, with "Mountain High, Valley Low" to share with Mr. Brynner. But it is his incidental and introductional music that deserves the greater praise. Several of Yeichi Nimura's dances are stunning. Most of John Houseman's direction is helpful. But—

Well, to get back to the beginning, Michael Myerberg's reproduction of Kao-Tong-Kai's "Pi-Pa-Ki" is a high, wide and handsome holiday for Robert Edmond Jones. The Great Chance-Taker has taken no chance with him. "Lute Song" is $185,000 worth of scenery, lights and costumes. They're wonderful! But there is a little play that insists upon intruding.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 7, 1946

'Lute Song' Is Beautifully Produced, but It's More Pageantry Than Play.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Lute Song," which has been several centuries in coming to Broadway, was unfolded in all its startling beauty last night at the Plymouth, and I wish its dramatic portions were comparable to its qualities as a spectacle. Pictorially, this new offering is something of surpassing loveliness, but weaknesses appear in the presentation of the narrative as the evening goes along.

This "Lute Song" is a novelty, and one done at staggering expense. Written by the late Sidney Howard and Will Irwin from the Chinese classic, "Pi-Pa-Ki," it's a delicate play with music, prodigally produced by that long-shot showman, Michael Myerberg. The production represents long months of tireless and devoted labor by him and his associates, and it is regrettable to report that the dramatic material of "Lute Song" is not closely woven, that the story is so completely overpowered by the pageantry.

"Lute Song" comes forth as a spectacle of vivid colorings and groupings; of stark simplicity in stage design, and the general effect is one of all-pervading beauty, but as a spectacle-play it has definite shortcomings dramatically.

The old, old play is a story of fidelity. Tsai-Yong, a young scholar in the village of Tchin-lieou, sets off to the capital of the Middle Kingdom to acquire further honors and knowledge, leaving his beautiful wife, Tchao-ou-Niang, with his parents. After reaching the capital he is married to a princess by royal command and is prevented from communicating with his wife. Famine descends upon the home province. His parents die in hunger and poverty and his wife sells her hair to pay for their burial. She then goes in quest of her husband, wearing a holy beggar's raiment, and she is unrecognized as she meets him along the North Road. Finally, in the palace of Prince Nieou, her identity is discovered, the princess nobly withdraws, and Tsai-Yong and the beautiful Tchao-ou-Niang are happily reunited.

All of this is told to the lovely backgrounds of Robert Edmond Jones, designs of an unearthly beauty; to the staging of John Houseman; to the appropriate music of Raymond Scott, in the Oriental strain and hauntingly in the mood of the play, and with costuming and Chinese effects that are authentic, imaginative and spectacular. Only in the dramatic sequences does "Lute Song" lag and because of these defects this timeless play of ancient China, as done at the Plymouth, does not provide a completely satisfying evening in the theater.

Mary Martin appears as the faithful and long-suffering bride. She speaks her lines well and sings beautifully. There's poignancy to her "Mountain High, Valley Low" and fetching gayety to "Monkey See, Monkey Do." Yul Brynner is physically suited to the role of the young husband. Clarence Derwent doubles nicely as the narrator and the Honorable Tschang and is bland and unctuous in his recitations. McKay Morris struggles with the comedy of the evening as the Imperial Preceptor, who forces the marriage of the wandering Tsai-Yong to the princess. Ralph Clanton speaks the commands of the Genie with power and resonance. Helen Craig appears as the princess.

"Lute Song" serves to strengthen a growing impression that Michael Myerberg is a producer of taste and daring. Perhaps he will do a thousand-and-year-old play his next time out. And it's to be hoped that this department's report of it will be one without today's reservations.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 7, 1946.

'Lute Song' Visually Magnificent But Selfconscious as to Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Visually, "Lute Song" is one of the most exquisite and most exciting things I have ever seen upon a stage, and once again Robert Edmond Jones shows he is the first-ranking artist of the contemporary American theatre. But as a piece for the theatre—as a story to grip mind or heart—it is a pose. Most earnestly and admirably done, yes; but a pose. What life it has throbs in Mr. Jones' magnificent decors and costumes and in snatches of Raymond Scott's interesting score. Life is not in the telling of its story, however. The telling is a selfconscious attitude which doubtless is arty as all hell but which reminded this oaf of the annual June play at a girls' school.

For many, many seasons various managements have announced production of "Lute Song," by Will Irwin and the late Sidney Howard. Finally it has come to Michael Meyerberg, a man who will have no truck with the ordinary, to present it at the Plymouth Theatre.

No one could have given the play more than Mr. Meyerberg has granted it. He has put Mary Martin in the main role and has surrounded her with an able group of fellow players. He has allowed Mr. Scott to compose a score which is not even remotely Tin Pan Alley. He has found Yoichi Nimura to devise some fascinating choreography, and John Houseman to stage the work. He has engaged Bernard Hanighen to write some nice lyrics, the best of which are "Mountain High, Valley Low," "Where You Are" and "Monkey See, Monkey Do."

A Chinese Tale.

"Lute Song," one is told, is based on a Chinese play. Its story is of a peasant scholar and the faith of his wife. When the scholar goes to the capital of the Middle Kingdom to seek fame and fortune he gets more than he has bargained for. He wins fame and fortune—but is made to marry a princess and held prisoner by the princess' wicked father.

"Lute Song" is a Chinese torch song. The young prisoner pines for his wife and the wife pines for him. She endures a famine in which her parents-in-law die, sells her hair for burial money. In reward for her selflessness the heavens open and a god directs her to don a nun's garb and seek her husband in the distant capital. It's tough going for Miss Martin, but it comes out all right.

It takes 17 scenes to accomplish the tale, and they are done in stately Chinese manner, with Clarence Derwent coming out as the stage manager every once in a while to give counsel to the audience. For a devotee of the Chinese theatre this must be pretty wonderful, but my mind wouldn't slow down to an Oriental pace and it would not, therefore, remain absorbed.

Miss Martin, in black hair now, is lovely, as usual—and again she shows that she is an actress as well as an uncommonly beguiling singer. McKay Morris is very good as the wicked prince. Yul Brynner is excellent as the mournful scholar and it is pleasure indeed to see fine old Augustin Duncan in the role of a blind peasant. Helen Craig puts nice feeling in the role of the unwanted second wife.

But the great man is Robert Edmond Jones. Whether he is dealing with simple curtains, temple scenes, visions of heaven or earthly pageants, he is a master, and his costumes are no less than superb.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 7, 1946

'Lute Song,' a Chinese Play, Stars Comely Mary Martin

By VERNON RICE

Charm can be a damning word.

That is the only word, however, applicable to "Lute Song," starring the Texas nightingale, Mary Martin, which Michael Myerberg presented at the Plymouth last night.

The musical play is full of charm; it is teeming over with it, and if the use of the word damns this Chinese love story with faint praise, that is how it is intended.

Dependable theatre minds have been busily at work, attempting to pour life into this fragile story. The late Sidney Howard with Will Irwin made the adaptation from the Chinese play, "Pi-Pa-Ki," Raymond Scott composed the music, Robert Edmond Jones did the sets, costumes and lighting, with Valentina working alone on Miss Martin's costumes; and the producer assembled a capable cast of such stalwart players as McKay Morris, Rex O'Malley, Clarence Derwent, Helen Craig and Augustin Duncan, under the expert direction of John Houseman, and yet, there was scarcely a time last night when it seemed at all worth the effort.

A Chinese Classic

It's a Chinese classic, this occidental version of the young man who goes to the big city to make good and the unshakable faith of the wife he leaves behind, and, no doubt, there is a limited appeal to the drama students and to those steeped in Chinese history and culture, but there the appeal ends.

Unquestionably, it has been given one of the finest productions of any play done recently. Robert Edmond Jones created costumes that are spectacular in their beauty and sets that are breath-taking in their simplicity. Houseman was wise in only borrowing certain traditions from the Chinese theatre and stylizing those traditions which he borrowed. Raymond Scott is to be commended for doing the same thing with the music.

Good taste abounds. Pageantry, mood and atmosphere are there, too. But over it all is the shroud of dullness.

The Story Slight

The story is so light that it can hardly bear repeating. A father decides that it is time to send his son out into the world, even over the protests of the boy's mother. His wife, however, thinks it is a good idea and she promises to remain behind to look after the parents.

Upon arrival in the capital of a middle kingdom to take imperial examinations, the young man is spotted by the ruler of the province as the desirable husband for his daughter. Being told by the boy that he is already married, has no effect on the preceptor, and a forced marriage takes place.

Meanwhile, he is cut off from his family, his parents die in a famine and his wife goes into a holy order and takes to begging and singing to her own accompaniment on a lute for subsistence.

The lad, of course, nearly perishes because of loneliness and when the princess learns that the former wife is begging in their town sends for her, gowns her lavishly and turns her over to the husband.

The end.

Delightful to See

Mary Martin, playing Tchao-Ou-Niang; the wife, is lovely to look at and moves about with the grace of a sail-boat on a calm lake, but there are times when she seems to be swallowed up by the production around her.

Yul Brynner makes a handsome husband, Tsai-Yong, but there his contribution to the play ends. It took such seasoned troupers as Augustin Duncan, playing the boy's father; McKay Morris as the girl's parent, Clarence Derwent, Helen Craig and Rex O'Malley to pump what little life there was to the evening.

Wilella Waldorf, The Post's Drama Critic, is ill.

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 7, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'Lute Song' Is Authentic, No Doubt, and a Bore

Whatever others may get out of "Lute Song," I must report that I was educated rather than entertained at the Plymouth last night—educated in Chinese classical drama. For "Lute Song" is an adaptation by Will Irwin and the late Sidney Howard (with music by Raymond Scott and lyrics by Bernard Hanighen) of a play first produced before the Son of Heaven 542 years ago. Mr. Irwin says the drama has been running in China ever since. I'll be surprised if it lasts that long over here.

If Michael Myerberg, the producer—who has given "Lute Song" an investiture and an investment worthy of Kublai Khan—has correctly instructed us, Morris Gest's "Chu-Chin-Chow," which the wicked New York drama critics panned as lavish bogus Orientalism when it was produced here 28 years ago, was much more like Chinese classical drama than the ignoramuses believed.

I hope no Chinese scholar will tell me that the course I took last night was unsound or that, in Americanizing "Pi-Pa-Ki" under the title of "Lute Song," the adapters have not quite kept the flavor of the original. For, having been educated in Chinese classical drama in San Francisco's Chinatown and by "Lady Precious Stream," "Chu-Chin-Chow" and "Lute Song," I have already learned more about it than I was anxious to know.

Too Much Education.

"Lute Song," indeed, sounds a warning against too much education. In it a young bookworm (Yul Bryaner) was unwise enough to read 6000 books. The current Emperor (circa 1400 A.D.) had the caprice of appointing those who showed any knowledge of literature to administrative offices. One book and you became official dog catcher. Two books and you were put in charge of sewage disposal. Six thousand and you had to become a prince and marry the daughter of the imperial preceptor of morals or get your head chopped off.

Mr. Brynner already had a wife (Mary Martin), an offspring of poor villagers. But he had to take the job and a new wife and keep his mouth shut. He didn't like his new wife (Helen Craig), and yearned to be back with Miss Martin. But they wouldn't even let him hear from her and his parents or send them any money.

Poverty Well-Clad.

Meanwhile there was a famine in his native village. His parents (Augustin Duncan and Mildred Dunnock) died of starvation and Miss Martin was reduced to beggary in a gorgeous white silk gown designed by Valentina. In another number by Valentina she had to sell her hair to give her husband's parents proper burial. Then, in still another Valentina special, she tramped hundreds of miles to the capital, arriving there without a speck of dust and pretty as a picture.

Miss Craig had just learned about the dirty deal her father had put over on her as well as on Mr. Brynner. She was against the Chinese idea of masculine domination and in favor of equal rights for women. Therefore she clothes Miss Martin in golden robes, crowns her princess and delivers her to Mr. Brynner as his rightful wife, now mistress of riches, love and splendor.

It takes three hours to arrive at this happy consummation. En route there is some Chinese music by Raymond Scott, some Chinese dances by Yeichi Nimura against many gorgeously colorful Chinese sets by Robert Edmond Jones, processions of famine victims and beggars (including Miss Martin in a nifty item—all others in rags), gong beating, dragon processions, exorcisms of the devil with blue lights, smoke, masks and other Morris Gest stuff which makes the story difficult at times, to follow.

The lovely Miss Martin sings four songs beautifully, one of which, "Mountain High, Valley Low," is so simple and so pretty you can't get it out of your head. Mr. Brynner sings two of these songs with her and one solo. It is a shame the Chinese Son of Heaven could not have had them for the original production. I think he also would have liked the way Clarence Derwent and MacKay Morris delivered the few funny lines. Maybe he would have liked the whole business. It just taught me an irksome lesson.

"Apple of His Eye"

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'Apple of His Eye' Honest Cornbelt Realism

Walter Huston, who seems of the essence of the pioneer stock of the Ohio Valley, the cornbelt and of the Western prairies (though born and reared in Toronto), returned to Broadway last night, after nearly six years in movieland, as the star of a delicate and endearing little item of rural Americana, entitled "Apple of His Eye," by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson.

Mr. Huston's starring vehicle was presented at the Biltmore by that directorial precisionist, Jed Harris, with all the care for details of naturalism, plus imagination, that we have come to associate with a Jed Harris production. It is a quiet, honest, compassionate and ironic study of the character of a substantial Indiana farmer, in relation to the character of his neighbors and members of his household, while he is undergoing a second blooming after being a widower for several years.

Homely Comedy.

The play is distinctly not for hepcats, or for those who demand excitement, action and guffaws in their drama, or for those who want their bucolic idylls romanticized, satirized or burlesqued. It is neither another "Tobacco Road" nor another "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm." Nor is it another "County Fair." It is just a delicately wrought gem of homely comedy about the queer behavior of a middle-aged, reasonable man who, much to his own surprise and distress, finds himself the victim of love's tyranny—and for a girl young enough to be his daughter.

The innocent cause of his unfamiliar pangs is a temporary housekeeper, brought in while his aged housekeeper is in hospital. She is the motherless daughter of an indigent neighbor—a sweet, efficient and only comparatively attractive girl (Mary James) who is as unaware of the nature and cause of Sam Stover's (Mr. Huston's) ailment as are all the others except Sam's confidant, Tude Bowers (Roy Fant). During the last three minutes of the play, after Mr. Huston has impulsively kissed her goodby, after having fired her, she realizes they have both been in love for some time.

Superb Portrayals.

There are confabs among the women-folk surrounding Mr. Huston (excluding, of course, Miss James) about the propriety of his having a young woman in the house, about his wining and dining her in a chop suey restaurant, about his taking her to a carnival and making a fool of himself by accepting the challenge of a young wrestler who threw him so hard and fast that he wrenched his back, and, finally, about the scandal (and an invasion of a son and daughter-in-law's inheritance rights) involved in the girl's snaring the old boy.

Nothing is exaggerated. All you get are two acts of two scenes each of superb portrayals of character, so realistic that you have the illusion of watching what is going on in an actual household of very human, human beings. Mr. Huston is an old wine that needs no bush. Special honors, however, must go to Miss James for a tremendously effective piece of work; to Joseph Sweeney as her father; to Mary Wickes as the daughter-in-law; and to Tom Elwell, as the son. The set by Raymond Sovey is as naturalistic as the play and the direction.

'APPLE OF HIS EYE.'

Play by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson; setting designed by Raymond Sovey; presented by Jed Harris in association with Walter Huston at the Biltmore Theater, Tuesday evening, February 5, 1946. The cast:

Stella Springer	Doro Merande
Foss Springer	Arthur Hunnicutt
Lily Tobin	Mary James
Tude Bowers	Roy Fant
Sam Stover	Walter Huston
Nina Stover	Mary Wickes
Carol Ann Stover	Jimsey Somers
Ott Tobin	Joseph Sweeney
Nettie Bowers	Claire Woodbury
Glen Stover	Tom Ewell

SYNOPSIS—The action of the play takes place several years ago at Sam Stover's Maple Lawn Farm, Highland Township, Montgomery County, Indiana. Act I—Scene 1: A Saturday afternoon in October. Scene 2: Afternoon, several days later. Act II—Scene 1: The following morning. Scene 2: That night.

Journal and American

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

'Apple of His Eye' Opens at Biltmore

By ROBERT GARLAND

The corn is overripe, well past its time for cutting, at the Biltmore Theatre. Last night, in the Indiana overalls of good old Sam Stover, good old Walter Huston tried his ingratiating best to save it. But, as the evening waxed and the interest waned, there was little that even so skillful a Broadway farmer as Mr. Huston could do to keep the maize from wilting.

In less agricultural words, the "Apple of His Eye," which Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson have written, Jed Harris and Walter Huston have produced and Mr. Harris has directed in a setting by Raymond Sovey, is on the silo side. A homespun narrative of May and September—or, unless my eyes deceive me, June and October—it falls short of its intentions.

Those intentions are to dramatize the "September Song" this very Walter Huston sang in an autumnal monotone along about 1939, when "Knickerbocker Holiday" was trying to achieve a run on 47th st., not far from last night's Biltmore. But, like many another thing, the lugubrious lament is better sung than said. Especially when Mr. Huston is the singer and the sayer.

In "Knickerbocker Holiday," at the Barrymore, September was none other than Peter Stuyvesant, while May was the Tina Tienhoven of whom you may not have heard. At the final curtain, Man relinquished Maid so posterity might think well of him.

* * *

Curious Triangle

In "Apple of His Eye," at the Biltmore, September is none other than Sam Stover, while May is the Lily Tobin on whom you wish he had not looked with more than an employer's retina. But Sam is not content with Lily as his hired-girl. Not even in the democratic living-room of his Maple Lawn Farm, which is in Highland Township, Montgomery County, Indiana, U. S. A.

Love comes to good old Sam and the "September Song" starts humming in his heart. It hums for good young Lily, Ott Tobin's well-trained daughter who can cook a meal, make a bed, deliver a calf and read James Whitcomb Riley aloud in that lovely Indiana hour between the dusting and the dinner. "Little Orphan Annie" is her poetic piece de resistance.

It also is her temporary undoing, the last straw that breaks the patience of Sam Stover's avaricious household, sends Lily home to father and leads the onlookers in the auditorium to believe that Playwrights Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson soon may bring September and May together and their "Apple of His Eye" to a happy ending—which almost any ending would be!

For their's is a curiously undramatic triangle, a threesome made up of Sam Stover, the Man; Lily Tobin, the Maid, and Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Robinson, the Other Fellows who, for playmaking purposes of their own, keep Man and Maid apart as long as possible.

* * *

Hoosier Polonius

With personality, fortitude and skill which would—and did!—charm a critic off his high-horse, Walter Huston brings good old Sam Stover to life. And with increasing personality, fortitude and skill he outwears his welcome keeping his Hoosier Polonius alive. But, even in Indiana, Polonius in love is silly and not even the art of Mr. Huston can make him sensible.

As Polonius' beloved hired-girl, Mary James makes her first professional appearance on Broadway. Along with Jed Harris, directing co-producer of "Apple of His Eye," I once saw her as Manuela in an Equity Library Theatre reproduction of "Maedchen in Uniform." She had something there! Roy Fant is his Boarder Jake-Uncle Smelique self again as Sam Stover's good friend Tude.

Mary Wickes, recovered from her bad spell in "Hollywood Pinafore," brings more to Nina Stover than Nina Stover brings to her Doro Merande, Tom Ewell, Arthur Hunnicutt, Joseph Sweeney, Claire Woodbury and little Jimsey Somers are as Hoosier as all get-out in complementary roles. More helpful than the others is Miss Merande, who wrings laughter from thin air . . .

So realistic is the humdrum Hoosier life caught at the Biltmore in Raymond Sovey's humdrum Hoosier sitting-room, that, before the eventless evening's over, you're afraid you're never going to see New York again. This makes no hit with me!

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"Apple of His Eye" is the wooing of May and December, but as a play it is more of December than it is of May. It has the lassitude of winter's age and the creaking muscles which are bad alike for those of late-middle years and the spoken drama. In writing it, Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson undoubtedly sought to tell no more than a brief bucolic idyl, and so no one has any right to get violent on the subject. But Jed Harris has wasted a good director's talent on a long and sleepy evening, and, what is worse, Walter Huston has come back after almost five years in a play far below his just abilities. The Biltmore's Hoosier holiday is just too thin for all concerned.

December is an Indiana farmer, a widower old enough to have a grandchild. May is the hired help, quite young. Feeling himself lonely and aging to boot, the farmer falls in love with the girl, carrying on his courtship with dinners at a Chinese restaurant by a lake, with visits to a carnival. There is talk in the neighborhood, of course, and the farmer's son and daughter-in-law, and all their friends, mutter that the old man is just being foolish. December discharges May for the good of all concerned. Then when she drops in to say good-by before departing on a visit elsewhere, the farmer realizes the errors of his attempted reconversion to youth; May likes him the way he naturally is. She accepts the mail-order wedding ring.

A simple story, that of "Apple of His Eye" under other circumstances could be human and touching. The Messrs. Nicholson and Robinson have not settled to the right mood, however, nor have the supporting players and the director. The neighbors are stock figures, as though they came from a mail-order catalogue on drama, the chapter headed Rustics. Mr. Huston has the ability to make believable almost any part he plays, but in this instance he must carry the neighbors along. December cannot persuade his May if at all times he is subject to interruption by casual burlesque; right at the start Mr. Huston should have slaughtered the traditional yokels with his scythe.

But probably more is wrong than just the visitors and their chatter. Since farmers and December and May suggest a taciturnity, the authors have picked something to be reserved about—the action. A courtship at an Indiana lake restaurant and a carnival could be a pleasant courtship for all concerned, but these incidents are reported upon, not shown. What takes place on the stage seems to be endless conversation leading only to the expected, with Mr. Huston and Mary James, who plays the girl, bringing out life most infrequently. For her part, Miss James is attractive and shows that with more to work with she could give the right mood, but "Apple of His Eye" just hasn't the substance. Doro Merande, Roy Fant, Mary Wickes and Tom Ewell are others in the cast. The direction is far from Mr. Harris' best.

PM

FEBRUARY 7, 1946

—Kronenberger—

Youth and Age, Country Style

PM Reviews

Had *Apple of His Eye* opened a year ago, I'd have judged it as unlikely a play for Jed Harris to produce as *Hamlet* would be for Mike Todd. Mr. Todd having meanwhile given *Hamlet* a production, and a very successful one at that, I shall hazard no further analogies. But I must still confess that *Apple of His Eye* seems an unlikely play for the dynamic Mr. Harris to produce—and as much in terms of his judgment as his tastes. For it's not simply that *Apple of His Eye* is as rustic—and as old-fashioned—as a cowbell. It's also that it is slow-moving, fearfully protracted and short of substance. Art is long, they say; but homey stuff can often be a darned sight longer. Even Walter Huston, with his easy acting and very likeable personality, can't bring this one off.

The Messrs. Nicholson and Robinson are writing of a well-fixed widower on an Indiana farm who falls in love with his hired girl. Sam Stover in his late 50s. Lily Tobin in her early 20s. She is respectful, even solicitous, of his age, and as far from suspecting he is in love with her as that—well, she is in love with him. He lacks the courage to pop the question; and while his family shivers and the neighbors gab, he temporizes with excursions to chop suey parlors and street fairs. Finally, he sends the girl away. But the Messrs. Nicholson and Robinson promptly bring her back.

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Apple of His Eye is completely harmless, made up of about equal parts of homespun and hokum. Mr. Huston makes a believable and at moments an appealing character of Sam Stover; the neighbors and farm help and in-laws are good for occasional laughs. But the familiar plot is padded out way beyond its ability to hold one's interest; and the play is further padded by all the minor characters who come drifting across the threshold or wandering down the stairs. Since much of all this is stock comedy and stencil characterization, you can't overlook what is tame about it on the plea that is is genuine. Being no more than a yarn, *Apple of His Eye* must succeed as entertainment to succeed at all. And it most decidedly doesn't.

The fault is not the cast's. Beyond Mr. Huston's engaging performance, and Mary James' very pleasant one as the hired girl, *Apple of His Eye* has lassoed on one stage the largest number of dependable character actors seen together in a long time. Doro Merande, Mary Wickes, Tom Ewell, Joseph Sweeney, Claire Woodbury, Roy Fant and Arthur Hunnicutt are all up to their appointed drawls, dialects and rural didoes, but they haven't been given any great chance to shine.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York Post

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

Huston Returns to Stage In May-December Romance

By BEN ROSENBERG

Walter Huston returned to Broadway last night in "Apple of His Eye," a May-December romance that has its roots in the Indiana soil of the farm his family had started 150 years ago, but we regretfully fear for the lasting powers of this production which Jed Harris has planted with such care on the stage of the Bitlmore Theatre. Co-authored by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson, the story moves along at a snail's pace, until the fires of love between an elderly widower and his young housekeeper are kindled in a welcome and fitting climax.

Seldom has a cast been fitted with characters with greater care, and throughout the two acts there is evidence of the expert direction by Mr. Harris, but there is too much small talk of a repetitious nature, until the action fairly dodders along, with only an occasional laugh and too few interesting moments.

A refreshing interlude is supplied by the little girl who plays Walter Huston's grandchild, when her granddad reneges on his promise to take her to the carnival so he can be alone with the "apple of his eye," his housekeeper. Jimsey Somers puts on a tantrum that is as real as any we have ever seen. Another bright spot comes when Huston turns on Stella Springer, his busybody neighbor, and sends her scampering for the door.

Huston is Huston, and his flawless performance of an aging farmer suddenly smitten with a young 'un will hold you despite the frail lines. As Sam Stover, he's on the stage often and gives the play whatever strength it possesses. His regular housekeeper, Nettie Bowers, is in the hospital when the play opens, recovering from an operation. Nettie is a bit bent by the weight of her years, but not the girl who took her place while she was away. Lily Tobin is a comely lass, just out of her teens, and Farmer Sam realizes she's to blame for his sudden restlessness and his willingness to part with a litter of pigs for a song.

And soon, the reason for Sam's shenanigans begins to dawn on his neighbors, his married son and daughter-in-law, his hired hand and Nettie, who resented Lily's staying on after her return. It's when Farmer Sam proves he ain't what he used to be in a wrestling match at a carnival that those around him set out to break up his romantic ideas. Farmer Sam yields and fires Lily when her father adds his objections to the match, but love triumphs when Lily comes to say goodbye, realizing for the first time that she, too, loves Sam, despite the disparity in their years.

With sprightlier lines and a lot more laughs, "Apple of His Eye" might have been a vehicle worthy of Huston's talents. It does serve to introduce Mary James, an actress of evident talent from whom we may expect much. She gives a compelling and vivid portrait as the young housekeeper. Doro Merande is perfect as the meddling neighbor, while Roy Fant as the hired hand and Mary Wickes as Sam's daughter-in-law also turn in outstanding jobs. In fact, as we indicated at the outset, the entire cast does well. Would that the material were as good.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Ripened by Huston

THERE is such a rich, earthy quality to "Apple of His Eye" that one is tempted to forgive its dramatic shortcomings. Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson have caught the feel of an Indiana farming community in their play at the Biltmore. Walter Huston and his assistants have done their characters more than ample justice, while Jed Harris has produced and staged the work with all the craft one might expect from him. That the show is disappointing, as well as rewarding, is a matter of construction rather than treatment. Pungent dialogue and brilliant performances make "Apple of His Eye" well worth seeing, but the drama itself lacks the cumulative urgency which it is forever promising.

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The authors have embroidered the theme of there is no fool like an old fool. Since Huston is an old hand at that sort of thing, they could not have had a better star for their contemplation of a romance between an aging Hoosier farmer and his young hired girl. The actor dominates the piece from start to finish, bringing a wry warmth to the central role which is utterly beguiling. His very presence on the stage is likely to camouflage the production's lack of punch for most play-goers. The fact remains that Nicholson and Robinson have created engaging people who are still looking for a drama at the final curtain.

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The play is at its best when it is describing the emotional turmoil of Sam Stover, when he discovers that he loves a girl young enough to be his daughter, but cannot declare himself. Huston works miracles with the characterization, making the ancient singularly sympathetic and always decent. Mary James is equally good at keeping little orphan Annie attractive and quite unaware of the commotion she raises in a small rural community. Together they bring the play to a fine flame for most of its four scenes, but the flame flickers badly before the old fool and the nice maid make their all too obvious compact with destiny.

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Part of the frailty of "Apple of His Eye" stems from the fact that the lesser characters are all played to the hilt, but have almost no bearing on the dramatic burden of the work. Doro Merande is marvellous as a spying and prying village gossip, who thinks the worst of a romance before it has even become one. Mary Wickes contributes a cruel portrait of a self-seeking daughter-in-law and the great Joseph Sweeney is superb as the hired girl's unctious father. There are performances to remember at the Biltmore, but they are too rarely brought into a cohesive and tensile dramatic pattern.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

Walter Huston Is Wasted in Homely Little Play Called 'Apple of His Eye.'

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Walter Huston has been one of the theater's most magnetic actors ever since he made his unheralded bow in "Mister Pitt" quite a few seasons ago. His parts have ranged from the fanatical Ephraim Cabot to Othello, from the gangling Elmer the Great to Peter Stuyvesant. And now he comes along in "Apple of His Eye"—and he is wasted.

This new comedy, written by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson, is a placid, slow-motion and flimsy little play of an Indiana farmer who takes a wife, and quite a young one at that. It is put on, unaccountably enough, by Jed Harris. The first performance was given last night at the Biltmore.

"Apple of His Eye" brings forth some arousing farm-life bits and offers some nice atmospheric touches as it ambles through its two acts, coming almost to a full stop near the close of the second. Walter Huston gives an easy, ingratiating and effortless performance but for all his skill and naturalness he can't make much of a play of the new Biltmore production.

Huston, returning to Broadway after a five-year absence, plays Farmer Sam Stover, a widower and well-to-do, who casts a romantic eye upon Lily, the hired girl, thirty years his junior. He takes various means to prove he isn't quite so antiquated and goes so far as to enter a wrestling match with a husky young fireman at a street carnival and suffers a badly wrenched back. Talk gets around in Highland Township, Montgomery county, Indiana, and the spreading gossip of the neighbors and the growing opposition of relatives causes Sam to send the girl away. But Lily returns to Maple Lawn farm and in a seemingly interminable end-of-the-play scene she and the rejuvenated Sam make a match of it.

There are some good, reliable, rural-type actors upon the Biltmore stage. Doro Merande is right in there with her dry, wry, whining comedy as a meddling villager. Arthur Hunnicutt contributes his drawling specialty and such players as Joseph Sweeney, Roy Fant, Mary Wickes and Tom Ewell are in customary form. And there is a likable performance from Mary James, playing the hired girl. She makes a nice impression in her first Broadway role. Raymond Sovey's setting has that farmhouse look.

"Apple of His Eye" is an amiable and unadorned comedy, and quite a listless one, too. It isn't worth Walter Huston's time.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

'Apple of His Eye' a Little Wormy For a Fine Actor Like Mr. Huston

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "Knickerbocker Holiday" in 1938 Walter Huston sang, in his own yet memorable fashion, a splendid number by Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson called the September song. Mr. Huston, as one-legged old Peter Stuyvesant, was making love and telling a young woman the advantages and disadvantages of their difference in age. "I've got a little money and I've got a little fame," he wheedled.

At the Biltmore Theatre last night Jed Harris, the barnyard Belasco, presented Mr. Huston in a bucolic version of the September song titled "Apple of His Eye," by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson. With all my great respect for Mr. Huston as an actor and for Mr. Harris as a manager and director, the best I can report is that Mr. Huston is splendid, the rest of the cast is fine and the play is something of an egg. Maybe a double-yolk egg, but still fragile.

In "Apple of His Eye" Mr. Huston again has a little money and has a little fame. He's a wealthy Indiana farmer and the head man in the neighborhood, being a Sunday school superintendent. He lives in a fine house with a hand-cranked telephone. A widower, he has a housekeeper, a hired man, a son, a daughter-in-law and a gossipy female neighbor to keep him happy.

Love Conquers Age.

But, as the neighbor puts it, he wants a slice off a fresh loaf. He discovers that he has fallen in love with a young hired girl who has come in while the housekeeper is off in a hospital some place to have her gallstones out. He is a decent man, this farmer, and is surprised at an old fellow like himself having such ideas. Family and neighbors themselves are surprised when he takes the younger woman out for chop suey and again to a fair.

Well, shucks, folks, you might as well know before you finish breakfast and before you stop reading this piece that Mr. Huston gets the hired girl. She calls him "Mr. Stover" all the way through but she really loves him.

Messrs. Nicholson and Robinson have managed a nice Hoosier atmosphere and plenty of pastoral platitudes. Mr. Huston, being one of the ablest players on the stage, makes Mr. Stover a believable and likable person. A newcomer, Mary James, plays the hired girl with admirable simplicity and appeal, and the rest of a Harris-chosen and Harris-directed cast is perfect as to type and performance.

The comedy, however, has little to say. It might have been written as a silent movie script. Perhaps it was.

"Born Yesterday"

The Sun

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

'Born Yesterday' Enormously Entertaining, Max Gordon Has Hit at Lyceum.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Garson Kanin has done it in his first try. His "Born Yesterday," presented last night by Max Gordon, offers some flip and fluent writing, some first-rate acting and an expert production, and it gives the Lyceum Theater a tremendously entertaining show. Gordon has his hit and the Lyceum its attraction for the season.

"Born Yesterday" is helped along mightily by two extraordinary performances. One comes from Paul Douglas, radio sports announcer suddenly turned actor, and now playing the toughest guy who has come to Broadway in quite a while, and the other from Judy Holliday, in the role of a dumb blonde who turns smart.

Not all of the Lyceum's new play is up to its wonderful first act. It slows down perceptibly here and there, particularly at the beginning of its second act. Several of its scenes can take, and will probably get, a little cutting. But so much of "Born Yesterday" is such really good fun it's a comedy to be thankful for.

Garson Kanin, in his first play for the New York stage, is writing of Harry Brock, a roughneck and an illiterate, who pushes people around. He has converted a junk yard into a few millions and he is quite a greedy boy. He moves in upon post-war Washington, settles himself in a $235-a-day hotel suite, and goes about his plans for buying himself some legislation in connection with his metal-salvaging operations. But he makes his big mistake when he engages a forward-thinking young newspaper man to give a cultural course to the girl he has brought along. Blonde Billie is smartened up and sharpened up to such an extent that she turns on her gangster and finally it is the bewildered Brock who is given the works.

There are some delightfully funny scenes in "Born Yesterday." Some moments, too, of violence when Harry, the millionaire thug, decides to get tough. The romantic interludes between the reporter-teacher and the knowledge-seeking Billie don't play too well, but this is a minor complaint. Donald Oenslager has provided a wildly rococo setting for the suite inhabited by the junkman and his entourage, and Kanin's direction heightens the values of his play.

Paul Douglas has great drive and comes through with a remarkable characterization as the bruiser who has an eye on all the scrap metal lying around war-torn Europe and who walks around his fancy suite with his shoes off. Judy Holliday was good last year in "Kiss Them for Me." In this new play she is marvelous. There are nice performances from Otto Hulett as Brock's general fixer, getting fed up with the job; Frank Otto as a slithering henchman; Larry Oliver as a bribe-taking Senator, and Gary Merrill, who teaches the dumb blonde to think. To the tough-talking Brock the blonde is endearingly known as "that broad."

It is apparently Max Gordon's intention to produce all the plays written by the Kanin family, and that will be quite all right with everybody who saw "Born Yesterday" last night. You will have a grand time at the Lyceum.

"BORN YESTERDAY," a comedy by Garson Kanin, with a setting by Donald Oenslager, directed by Mr. Kanin and presented by Max Gordon at the Lyceum Theater with the following cast:

Helen	Ellen Hall
Paul Verrall	Gary Merrill
Eddie Brock	Frank Otto
Bellhop	William Harmon
Bellhop	Rex King
Harry Brock	Paul Douglas
The assistant manager	Carroll Ashburn
Billie Dawn	Judy Holliday
Ed Devery	Otto Hulett
Barber	Ted Mayer
Manicurist	Mary Laslo
Bootblack	Paris Morgan
Senator Norval Hedges	Larry Oliver
Mrs. Hedges	Mona Bruns
Waiter	C. L. Burke

SYNOPSIS—The scene is Washington. Act I: September, 1945. Act II: Two months later. Act III: Late that night.

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

Kanin's 'Born Yesterday' Lively Farce Melodrama

"Born Yesterday," a melodramatic farce-comedy by Garson Kanin, which opened at the Lyceum last night, rings the bell on all counts as sheer entertainment. In idea, construction, dialog, acting, direction, costuming and set, it is tops in that sort of thing. It is great good fun, ribald, adult, witty and clever; its characterizations are obvious but sharp; it drives home an ancient message with an air of timeliness and melodramatic force; it is psychologically sound on the vagaries of the tender passion, and it has pace, suspense and physical action.

Moreover, it is a triumphant vehicle for two players who are practically fledglings in the theater—Judy Holliday and Paul Douglas. Miss Holliday has appeared on Broadway only once before and then in a brief bit in a notable success of esteem, "Kiss Them for Me," in which she gave one of the best supporting performances of the year. Mr. Douglas is best known as a radio sports commentator. This is also his second appearance on Broadway, his first being in a flop back in 1935. In this play Miss Holliday and Mr. Douglas are the most exciting pair in the local theater at the moment, not forgetting the marvelous Lunts.

Plot Easy to Perceive.

Toots Shor, a restaurant man, was widely reported to have said after the first act of the current "Hamlet," that he was the only man in the house who didn't know how the thing was going to come out. After the first act of "Born Yesterday," however, Mr. Shor whispered to me, "But already I know the payoff on this one."

Mr. Shor was not alone this time: everybody in the house did. From the very moment the idealistic young commentator for a high-brow weekly shows up, you know that, in the end, he is going to take the underprivilegede tart away from the rich roughneck and make an honest and educated woman out of her. You know that he and the gal are going to land the shover-arounder in a pickle, if not in the pen.

And you know that the commentator who has read a couple of books and can quote from them is going to discover he has found a woman with a brilliant mind in the little alley cat whom he has taught to read, to understand what the Supreme Court is, not to say "ain't" and to listen to Sibelius on the gramophone. And, knowing Mr. Kanin's evangelical mission in life, you can also guess that en route, there will be some insinuations that all Republicans are Fascists and that there will be some rather depressing oratory about the brave new world that began with the Atlantic Charter.

Not a New Theme.

But, in "Born Yesterday" it is not the beginning, or the end, or the brief sermons on democracy that matters; it is what goes on between Mr. Douglas and Miss Holliday. And that is melodramatic farce comedy of a very superior order. If Mr. Kanin mistakes his entertainment for a drama of great social significance, you must remember that this is his first play and that, having been born only yesterday as a thinker (like Miss Holliday in the play), he doesn't know that Joseph Medill Patterson did this same down-with-crooked-combines-of-legislators-and-rascals-of-great-wealth theme, with much stronger effect, in a play called "The Fourth Estate," nearly 40 years ago.

The play tells of a junk dealer who has risen from the humble beginning of a kid thief who stole junk from a yard and sold it back to the dealer to a thief who buys senators and is working up a scheme to swindle the government out of the convertible steel. It tells also of his come-uppance and of how he was foiled in his evil designs by the ex-tart and the incorruptible newsman.

What makes the show good is that Mr. Kanin has created an Al Capone of big industry and that Mr. Douglas has played the role to the hilt, with consuming fire and conviction and that he has created a tart with a heart of gold, whom Miss Holliday brings to life on the stage with all the bravura histrionics she gave to her bit in "Kiss Them for Me."

There may be a touch of nepotism in the fact that Mr. Kanin's sister designed the set; but, if so, hurrah for nepotism, for it is the gaudiest set the stage has boasted of in years. Miss Holliday and Mr. Douglas have excellent support from players who know their onions about farce-comedy, particularly Frank Otto and Gary Merrill. It is a show which I think even dirty Republican reactionaries would greatly enjoy but not some New Dealers who may deny such goings on are possible under a Democratic administration.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

'Born Yesterday' Bows at Lyceum

By VERNON RICE

Great and profound truths under the guise of comedy were spoken from the stage of the Lyceum last night.

Nothing new, understand. Things we have been hearing over and over again, but they were ideas which should be heard over and over again. Perhaps then, they would penetrate through the thick skulls of a great many people we could name, so we could finally get started on this fine new world about which we've heard so much the last several years.

As a matter of fact, there is hardly a surprise in Garson Kanin's "Born Yesterday," which Max Gordon brought to the above mentioned theatre. After the first five minutes of the faltering first act even a six-year-old, who made his initial visit to the theatre day before yesterday, could predict the comedy's ultimate end.

And yet, it should be seen.

It should be seen by those who believe that the new meek shall inherit the earth. They will be re-stirred with hope by the playwright's old but militant message.

It should be seen by those who don't believe, for maybe they will be forced to recognize the handwriting on Mr. Kanin's and the world's new wall.

What happens in "Born Yesterday" happens in the United States. Washington, D. C., to be specific. Harry Brock, a robber baron of our era, comes to the Capital with his own small entourage to form a one-man lobby. He wants all the scrap iron in the world, practically, and he wants it now and at any cost.

In his gruesome band is his mistress, Billie. Billie is not dumb. She is beyond that. She is just the person to make "I and Dorothy," of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" fame, candidates for "Information, Please."

But Billie is happy. She has all that she wants out of life. Two mink coats.

She is happy, that is, until she reads a book, and then another, and still, several others, under the tutelage of a young writer of, "The New Republic," who had been hired to smarten her up so that she might be trusted to come out of the boudoir long enough to say something else besides "Yes."

Not only is she Brock's mistress, she is a multiple corporate body as well. Some 126 companies are in her name, and, needless to say, before the play's end, she awakens to what has been going on and gives some of the many papers she has been signing without the slightest idea of their contents to her young tutor to use as a probable expose.

Needless to say, too, that she is off to marry the boy midst speeches about people being pushed around and the day of government between friends is over.

But those speeches are important. They can't be heard too many times. By you and you and you.

"Born Yesterday" is the play in which Jean Arthur was to make her reappearance on Broadway. Miss Arthur, however, became ill on the pre-Broadway tour and was forced to withdraw from the cast. Judy Holliday was called in next to the last minute to replace her.

It is too bad that Miss Arthur had to become ill so that Miss Holliday could have another chance to show what a fine comedienne she really is; but as she had to be given it, it is to her credit that she made Billie one of the joys of the season.

Just her mere walking across the stage becomes a moment of comical delight. And we never knew that a game of gin-rummy could be anything but a bore. When Judy plays it, however, prepare for the riot squads.

Paul Douglas returns from radio to play Harry Brock, the man who has lived all his life at the top of his voice. Several times during the course of the evening we would have willingly bashed his head in—a tribute, rather than a challenge.

Gary Merrill, who plays Paul Verrall, the young writer, and the rest of the cast aid immeasurably in making the comedy come to life.

The one set by Donald Oenslager is in keeping with the spirit of the play and Garson Kanin has directed his own work without subtlety, but with his eye on the clock, his hand on a whip and his ears tuned to a siren.

"Born Yesterday" is the people's play done up with class. Call it a hit.

Journal American

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

'Born Yesterday Bows at Lyceum

By ROBERT GARLAND

They were laughing with fears in their eyes last night at the Lyceum. They had reason to. "Born Yesterday," written by Garson Kanin and produced by Max Gordon, is a funny play with unfunny implications; a tough, tender, terrifying showpiece with everything to recommend it to the theatregoer in search of entertainment, enlightenment or a swift kick in the great American complacence.

Considered cautiously in any one of these contradictory aspects, as entertainment, enlightenment or a swift kick in the great American complacence, "Born Yesterday" is a brilliant addition to the Broadway scene. Brilliantly written, brilliantly acted and brilliantly staged, there are a sardonic undercurrent to its laughter and a bitter background to the serio-comic tale it tells.

In 45th st. the most is made of Mr. Kanin's play and the players who appear therein. Against a fine satiric setting by Donald Oenslager, in fine satiric costumes by Ruth Aronson, a collection of well-considered players gives "Born Yesterday" the beautifully brash, the brashly beautiful, interpretation it definitely deserves. The author, as director, has seen to that.

Listening down between the lines, "Born Yesterday" is fearsome first, then funny. Listening up on the lines, "Born Yesterday" is funny first, then fearsome. Up on the lines is the proper place to listen. There, it is good, mean fun.

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Guy and Girl

Listening up on the lines, you hear the story of the Big Tough Guy and the Small Tough Girl with whom he is entangled. In Garson Kanin's play, the Big Tough Guy is Harry Brock. He's the Harry Brock who began collecting junk while selling newspapers in Plainfield, N. J., and finished collecting junk while buying Senators in Washington, D. C. That, at any rate, is the impression a descending curtain leaves.

It is the Small Tough Girl who finally does him in. Billie Dawn by name, she has fallen from her high estate as Vinton Freedley's chorus girl in "Anything Goes" to her low estate as Henry Brock's co-mistress-mine in that Big Tough Guy's unhallowed set-up.

Relations are quite all right between Guy and Girl until the Other Fellow comes along, bearing true love in one hand and The New Republic in the other.

This New Republic leads to a desire for reading on the part of the Small Tough Girl. And a desire for reading leads to a little dictionary. Now, in the Big Tough Guy's menage, a little dictionary is a dangerous thing. So dangerous is it that it breaks up the Guy-keeps-Girl relationship, breaks down the junk-collecting racket and brings the Small Tough Girl and The Other Fellow together.

As goes without saying, this retelling of the story of the Big Tough Guy, the Small Tough Girl and The Other Fellow ignores its sinister, its fearful, its anti-social connotations. They are there, though, to put fears in laughing eyes.

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Good for Judy

The cast, directed by the author, could not be improved upon. Broadway, from the Empire on the south to the Columbus Circle on the north, knows no better. At its head is Judy Holliday whose Small Tough Girl is as fine as it is flawless. Nobody, not even from the bigger Hollywooden brackets could project this Billie Dawn with more toughness, tenderness and skill. Miss Holliday is tops.

And when you're tops to Paul Douglas' Harry Brock, the Big Tough Guy of the Big Tough Guy-Small Tough Girl story, you're tops, indeed. I've small idea where, when and how Mr. Douglas learned about these anti-American Americans, but he has learned about them in a terrifying school. As Billie Dawn points out to him, he just is "not couth." Which shows also what a little dictionary can do!

Paul Verrall is as he should be as the educated Other Fellow, even if I did hear him make use of "different than." Otto Hulett is to the manner born as Ed Devery. The others are in the unpretty picture, from the bellhop of William Harmon to the assistant manager of Carroll Ashburn, from the Senator of Larry Oliver to the bootblack of Paris Morgan. "Born Yesterday" has been done right by.

And "Born Yesterday" is, as I have said, a funny and fearsome play, brilliantly written, brilliantly acted and brilliantly staged. In other, and equally well-chosen words, Max Gordon and Broadway have a new success to light up their marquees.

"Born Yesterday"—*continued*

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

'Born Yesterday,' Comedy at Lyceum, Shows Political Slant

By LEWIS NICHOLS

If this country keeps the faith with her playwrights, the United States obviously is to be the new Utopia, and almost immediately. Following a trail set by others this season, Garson Kanin has turned a roving eye on Washington, the happy result being displayed last evening at the Lyceum under the title of "Born Yesterday." Probably Mr. Kanin is not a deep political thinker, but his heart is in the right place, and in addition he knows a funny line when he sees it on his own paper. "Born Yesterday" is one of the more amusing occasions of the season. It is light, with an undercurrent from the still waters, it is acted with enthusiasm and—well, let Washington take heed.

* * *

Mr. Kanin's bad man is a modern robber baron, one who pyramided junk yards to such an extent that he owns a Senator. Living with him in a $235 per diem room is a girl taken from the chorus of "Anything Goes!", which was a good show, too. On the dim side, she naturally must be taught book learning, so that she can mingle gracefully with Senators' wives, and so the baron hires a reporter for The New Republic to teach her. Mr. Kanin is not unaware of the inevitable ending to the Pygmalion story, and he tries to give it no twist beyond the fact the girl picks up social consciousness along with the works of Tom Paine and Sibelius. At the end, she and her teacher retire to whatever salaries The New Republic pays for a clean scoop, and the baron probably is headed for Alcatraz.

No doubt a precisionist for dramatic forms would find in the references to "Anything Goes!" more than meets the eye. Mr. Kanin has flung into "Born Yesterday" whatever his hand, being quicker than the eye, could grab. There is the lowly wisecrack, raised indeed to a high degree; there is melodrama; there are pathos, earthiness of expression and even brisk burlesque. There are times when the author could have used his red pencil less sparingly, for some of the scenes, even the funniest, are drawn out a little too long. Mr. Kanin, being no amateur, saves his best jokes to bring an end to serious moments, but now and then they are just a bit delayed. Of course, not even the government is perfect.

In that respect the chief performers run ahead of the elected officers. Judy Holliday, one time member of The Revuers, is the former member of the chorus, and she is quite wonderful. She speaks in the flat tone of utter blonde dumbness—to use the robber-baron's word for it—pantomiming some of the action, and then in her Galatea phase turning into quite a person. Paul Douglas, normally of the air, also is fine as the tough, violent junk-dealer, who thinks a good slapping around will cure most things and that money is the root of all power. Otto Hulett is the lawyer, Frank Otto the stooge for the prince of old iron, and both are good at it; Gary Merrill is extremely likable as the correspondent for The New Republic. Mr. Kanin has been expert in his direction, and Max Gordon, as producer, has seen that Donald Oenslager's setting is worth every cent of $235. a day.

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DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

Judy Holliday Perfect As Dumb Broad in Very Funny Play

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I have seen some dumb broads on the stage, but Miss Judy Holliday is the dumbest broad yet. With her big googly eyes, her dead pan, her flat voice, and her highly pictorial front and rear elevations, she went through Garson Kanin's "Born Yesterday" at the Lyceum last night in hilarious fashion. Playing with her is a dumb ox named Paul Douglas, and I have never seen a better dumb ox, either. The result is a very funny play.

Another comedy, incidentally, about Washington politics—but not so sharply political as "State of the Union."

"Born Yesterday" seems to be a combination of "Dulcy," Pygmalion" and "The Hairy Ape." Even with all these for a start the play runs a mite thin here and there, but not thin enough to keep it from being very entertaining.

The Higher Education.

Mr. Douglas is a loud, scrappy, ruthless and ambitious junk dealer who thinks he has almost all the money in the world. He wants the rest of the money, so he comes to Washington, buys a senator for $80,000, and works up a political deal whereby he will own all the postwar scrap iron on the globe. (Mr. Kanin doesn't give many details about this little trick, except to have Miss Holliday sign some papers every once in a while.)

With Mr. Douglas comes Miss Holliday, ex-chorine who has been his companion for nine years. She admits she is stupid—and says she likes it. But Mr. Douglas seems to think she ought to brighten up a bit if she is going to mix with senators and their wives, so he hires a young intellectual who writes for the New Republic to polish her up.

Staged by Author.

She polishes slowly, and her bouts with books, newspapers and the dictionary are most amusing. She begins to get the idea of what a democracy is about; she begins to resent the way her domineering keeper pushes everybody around. She does, in fact, foil the dastardly international grab, and walks out on her boy friend with the high purpose of marrying the nice young muckraker from the New Republic.

A mechanical enough contrivance, this story—but adequately useful for the talents of the two leading players and several well-chosen supporting ones. Mr. Kanin, who directed his own play, has used the trick of stage-waits, or just plain silence, a little too often. I think he should have used the trick as he did in a hilarious scene in which Miss Holliday schneiders Mr. Douglas at gin rummy—used it, and then forgotten about it. Several times I wished for a little faster playing.

But then, maybe it was the audience's fault. I thought it was the most unresponsive assemblage of the season—and audiences should make their own contribution to the pace of a comedy.

Gary Merrill is excellent as the young intellectual. So is Otto Hulett as a drunken lawyer, and Frank Otto assists amusingly as a hard-faced stooge. Donald Oenslager has designed a wonderfully gaudy $235-a-day Washington hotel layout, and Mainbocher has draped Miss Holliday in several sets of seductive stuff.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

By Howard Barnes

Rates a Salute

GARSON Kanin has written "Born Yesterday" with a marvelous combination of wit and indignation. Produced with what comes close to perfection at the Lyceum Theater, his comedy is an uproarious delight. The author has chosen an unsavory war profiteer for his particular pillory, but he has surrounded him with a wonderful set of characters, ranging from a dumb blonde to a crusading magazine writer. Having staged the piece himself, he has seen to it that the accents are precise and that the fun is sustained. Having Paul Douglas, a gentleman of some consequence in radio doings, giving a masterful portrayal of the political pal joey and Judy Holliday right up there with him as the babe who learns to read a book, the show's serio-comic substance receives brilliant stage reflection.

* * *

There are a few laggard passages in the course of three acts, but they are more than atoned for by the general merriment. From the moment that a big racketeering junk dealer moves into a fancy hotel suite in Washington to grab off the scrap iron left around after World War II, until his final first steps in democracy, taught him painfully by his erstwhile mistress, "Born Yesterday" has speed, colorful characterizations and solid comedy. The situations dovetail nicely as the would-be Fascist gets his come-uppance. The lines are either lyrically amusing or tremendously ribald and there is more than one scene of straight pantomime to hold a playgoer enchanted.

* * *

Kanin has been in a punning mood with this dramatic composition. The only wonder is that he has been able to top some of the antic notions he tosses around so prodigally from the very start of the entertainment. Occasionally he has struck a singularly savage note, but he has been too much of a showman to throw the play out of its particular comic key. The tag line of the second act is one that will be repeated for some time along Manhattan's boulevards. Miss Holliday's assault on culture, in the part of the ex-chorus girl, is a piece of bravura solo performing. Since Douglas plays the role of the millionaire junkman with engaging and evil emphasis, the piece is whole, vibrant and altogether captivating.

Douglas deserves most of the acting honors. It is no easy task to play a heel, keep him in the focal point of a drama and still summon laughter. It is exactly this that he does. There have been fine performances this season, but few that can outrank his characterization of Harry Brock, the Jersey boy who thought he could buy out the government itself, until a dizzy blonde told him off. Miss Holliday replaced Jean Arthur in the play during its try-out. The part could not have been bettered. Otto Hulett, Frank Otto and Larry Oliver round out the acting with pungent bits. Max Gordon has given the new Lyceum offering a handsome production, with the aid of a really striking set by Donald Oenslager, and Mainbocher has brought his gift of designing to the costumes. "Born Yesterday" should have a bright future. It is an entrancing, tough comedy.

PM Exclusive

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

A Nice Evening With a Bad Egg

PM Reviews

The news from the Lyceum is cheerful. With his first play, Carson Kanin has made a brighter Broadway. He is also, along slapdash comedy lines, trying to make a better world. *Born Yesterday* is fun at the expense of what is anything but funny; an angry theme turned into an entertaining evening. Mr. Kanin is pursuing one of the more dangerous enemies of society with a barrage of gags; he is preaching human rights with flippant humor. There are far more forcible ways of making people think, or act, or alter; but there is certainly no smarter way of making people listen.

Mr. Kanin's target is a big-time, roughneck racketeer who has gobbled up thousands of junkyards. He has come to Washington, where he keeps a Senator on his payroll, with a postwar itch to gobble up—all over the world—thousands more. While he is deep in skullduggery, he has the "dumb broad" he is living with tutored in the social and intellectual graces suitable to the capital. Unfortunately for him, his choice of a tutor is a bright young liberal on the *New Republic* staff. It need scarcely be added that, in terms of teacher and pupil, the plot becomes a New-Deal *Pygmalion* story; and, in terms of the rough-riding plunderer, a modern-day *Frankenstein*.

Mr. Kanin's pursuit of his theme is a good deal less than classical; in fact, much of *Born Yesterday* appears to have been fished up out of the grab-bag. Mr. Kanin gets off to an extremely exhilarating first act, in which the big shot and his blonde, installed in a $235-a-day hotel suite, have an unforced vitality and achieve a very amusing relationship. But once the plot takes over, much in the way of characterization is lost. So (without any real gain in seriousness) is much in the way of solid entertainment. Mr. Kanin still squeezes fun out of one thing or another—particularly the lady's bouts with book learning; he plugs up holes with gags; he works in some melodrama, when the racketeer tries to get tough. But as a straight show that also tries to get something said, *Born Yesterday* shows none of the tidy workmanship of a *State of the Union*. After the first act, it lives pretty much from hand to mouth. Thanks to enough funny cracks and to some admirable acting—of which more in a moment—*Born Yesterday* manages to be diverting. But in terms of how it opens, and what it opens out on, it is fairly disappointing.

• • •

It would be worth seeing, however, just for Paul Douglas' and Judy Holliday's acting. Mr. Douglas' racketeer is a pretty ugly customer whose babboon ways and roughneck ignorance are also highly entertaining. Miss Holliday is often quite wonderful—particularly before her education sets in, and she can make the most of her flat voice and high-styled floozie walk. Just watching her sort her cards at gin rummy is a treat. The other performers are of no great importance, though Gary Merrill is pleasant as the *New Republic* man. But Mr. Kanin's direction is lively and ingenious, and Donald Oenslager's classy, cluttered set just right for its inhabitants.

—Louis Kronenberger

"January Thaw"

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

Todd Offers a Light But Bright Farce

By ALTON COOK.

Michael Todd, who has been devoting his talent for several seasons to parlor entertainment for people not content to stay in their own parlors, was mild in his demand about your getting into a taxi, bus or subway to see his new play last night. The play is "January Thaw," at the John Golden.

At intervals it offers laughter for people who want to laugh at friends who had trouble with suburban difficulties, or laughter about the impulsive mating urges of youngsters isolated on farms, or laughter about city slickers who don't know how to build a fire, let alone how to cook coffee over one.

"January Thaw" is parlor entertainment with moments of good mirth and, inevitable in this style of diversion, its lulls. Mr. Todd, in his preoccupation with keeping people mirthful, probably has not thought that it would be well to keep them intent also on what happens to the people in a play.

Depends on Its Jokes.

The people in this play are amiable enough but only so long as they keep on spouting jokes. They have a lot of jokes, but in the intervals they have no prancing chorus line to bridge the lull. At such times characters must settle down to a short session of advancing the plot, and things grow less lively.

The misfortunes of the city people in Bellamy Partridge's novel are as comic as obvious to the rest of us city people. The slickers install all the gadgets of a city apartment in a country house and are left helpless when electricity fails and a man can't even shave. An open fire is strictly for ornamental purposes and toasting marshmallows.

How the Cast Fared.

This kind of a family rents a country house, unaware that its rough and ready pioneers are to occupy a corner and look down on people so inept they must go into the restaurant for an occasional meal. Daughters of such city families are wild and loose, and it is easy to think of an elopement or worse when a boy and girl depart on a prolonged errand of mercy to a neighbor. That is the plot of "January Thaw," the part when people quit cracking jokes about the various failings of city people and country people.

When the relationship among characters depends on how well jokes go with the audience, the performances in a play must be rated on that factor. The heartiest laughter went to Charles Burrows, who doddered in occasionally as an ancient purveyor of gossip. Next rank last night went to Charles Middleton, who had the fat role of the countryman wise in housecraft and patiently awaiting the city folks' plea for help.

There were various others adept in getting full value from single comic lines but unable to wrestle with the play's lack of character. Robert Keith as the worldy-wise but country-ignorant writer, and a raucous but shrewdly directed little girl named Lorna Lynn seemed most effective.

Times Favor Todd.

At the very end of second-act intermission last night, Mr. Todd himself stormed down into the lounge room past late smokers, demanding, "What was the comment down here?" People around me remarked they hadn't heard a thing and it seemed singular.

Bets can be laid, however, that Mr. Todd may expect good profit from his new play. He has his own extraordinary notions of what constitutes proper mode in Shakespeare ("Hamlet"), French classics (Bobby Clark in Moliere), musical comedy (the placid prettiness of "Up in Central Park") and a play (last night). But we are having extraordinary and very tolerant times at the box office.

"JANUARY THAW," a comedy by William Rose, based on the novel by Bellamy Partridge, setting by Watson Barratt, directed by Ezra Stone and presented by Michael Todd at the Golden Theater with the following cast:

Sarah Gage.....Lorna Lynn
Frieda.....Norma Lehr
Paul Gage.....Charles Nevil
Herbert Gage.....Robert Keith
Marge Gage.....Lulu Mae Hubbard
Bargara Gage.....Natalie Thompson
George Husted.....John Hudson
Jonathan Rockwood.....Charles Middleton
Mathilda Rockwood.....Helen Carew
Mr. Loomis.....John McGovern
Uncle Walter.....Charles Burrows
Matt Rockwood.....Irving Morrow
Carson.....Henry Jones
Melvin Gorley.....Paul Weigl

SYNOPSIS—The living room of an old house in Connecticut. The Gage family, after restoring it to its Colonial state, have just moved in. Act I—Scene 1: A morning in June. Scene 2: Evening of the same day. Act II—Scene 1: Next September (early morning). Scene 2: The following January (late afternoon). Act III—Early next morning.

PM

FEBRUARY 6, 1946

They Huffed & They Puffed

PM Reviews

An empty-headed, hyperthyroid little farce called *January Thaw* huffed and puffed its way across the stage of the Golden Theater Monday evening, obviously hoping that if it moved fast enough, no one would notice that it was pretty much ado about nothing. It fired gag after gag at you, wisecrack after wisecrack—pregnancy, Harvard, modern plumbing, horse manure and the Democrats all came in for their share; it brought a pair of live pigs onstage and it built an outhouse offstage; and it moved pretty darned fast and you laughed more than once. But, in the end, the parade of gags—even the few funny ones, and particularly those with an "up-to-the-minute" slant — boomeranged. Gags must sooner or later show the thinness of any play that relies too heavily upon them.

All of *January Thaw's* plot arises from one of those situations dear to farce that you're not supposed to examine, but merely accept so things can get started. A New York writer and his family are forced—by lease—to share a Connecticut farmhouse they have just moved into, with the original occupants—a crusty self-reliant farmer, his old-fashioned wife and their wolfish, shiftless son. These three are firm admirers of outhouses, chamber pots, wood stoves and Calvin Coolidge. For two acts the two families bicker over the old vs. the new.

Characters in farces seldom have human dimensions. They are cardboard setups to help promote a laugh; they do not require that the audience feel any emotion or liking for them. This is true of all of *January Thaw's* players but two. Charles Middleton and Helen Carew bring amazing dignity and stature to the farmer and his wife. They have a simplicity that will recall, oddly enough, the Dust Bowl people of *The Grapes of Wrath;* that makes them seem throughout the evening to be moving on a plane all their own in the midst of this shrill, strained farce. They both deserve a better play. And so does Ezra Stone, whose staging of *January Thaw* shows that he has learned well from the master director of farce, George Abbott.

—SEYMOUR PECK.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

'JANUARY THAW'

Bellamy Partridge's novel "January Thaw," which has been steadily winning a place for itself on the bookdealer's best seller lists these many weeks, turned up, as was inevitable, behind the footlights last evening. The stage adaptation is the work of William Roos, and it was placed on the stage of the John Golden Theater under the flag of the very active Michael Todd. The result must be put down today as somewhat disappointing.

"January Thaw" as a play has its genuinely hilarious moments all right. Any one who has read the book would know that would be a certainty. The trouble is that there aren't enough of them to fill a whole evening.

The fundamental difficulty is that in transferring the Partridge work from between the covers of a book, Roos hasn't succeeded in turning out a well rounded play. In his effort to work in the novel's funniest situations he has leaned far too heavily on individual situations and on gag lines for his laughs. As a result his "January Thaw" is spotty, and too often implausible.

The basic theme is still there, of course. The long-absent Yankee Rockwoods turn up at the remodeled Connecticut farm as per schedule and plunge the new owners, the Gages, into the amusing dilemma that Partridge contrived as they move in and claim the place. In streamlining the story for the stage, however, Roos has of necessity taken some liberties with the original plot, and not all of his changes are to the good. Gone is the legal solution that untied the knot in the book, and in its place is a routine and sugary climax. Then, in the Roos version, the Rockwood's errant son is very much in the picture, and he doesn't improve the evening's fun.

The play's best moments are when the elder Rockwoods are on the stage, and Charles Middleton and Helen Carew make the returning old settlers as real and earthy as the Connecticut soil itself. Charles Burrows is a delight, too, as their Uncle Walter and this onlooker, at least, could have wished that he had come wandering down the road more frequently. They make the Gages from Manhattan seem mere cardboard figures most of the evening. Robert Keith as the harassed writer who heads the Gage family is the most believable of the lot, but Lulu Mae Hubbard never succeeds in getting his wife to appear anything but the nitwit Roos has drawn. John Hudson is pleasantly natural as the elder Gage daughter's suitor. The other performances, however, are distinctly routine.

Ezra Stone, recently released from the Army Air Corps, has obviously sought in his direction to keep the play rolling merrily, but even he can't help stretches from meandering nor hold the script together. Watson Barratt's setting for the farmhouse living room is excellent. It far more exceeds, in fact, much of the action that goes on in front of it.

HERRICK BROWN.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

New York Post

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

'January Thaw' Opens at Golden

By BEN ROSENBERG

The venturesome Michael Todd is pushing his luck with a fourth production on Broadway. Last night it was "January Thaw," a new comedy by William Roos, based on Bellamy Partridge's book, and the capricious lady of fortune gave Mike her most engaging smile as he launched his latest offering on the stage of the John Golden Theatre. It may not have the staying powers of "Up in Central Park," or the quality of Maurice Evans' "Hamlet," nor an effervescent Bobby Clark's "The Would-Be Gentleman," but this addition to the Todd family is a sturdy toddler, sparkling with frequent and explosive chuckles.

"January Thaw" has its faults—an incredible story, a slow-moving first act and a cast that sometimes performed as if the biting cold they were supposed to endure really was penetrating. But these shortcomings are of minor consequence. After the first act the play warms up and the lines crackle across the footlights, setting off a panic of laughs in the audience.

Fire Alarm Ends Chatter

The curtain goes up on the living room of an old house in suburban Connecticut. The head of the house, Herbert Gage, a writer, is pecking away at a typewriter, interrupted constantly by his wife, two daughters, a son and a prospective son-in-law, a soldier. The chatter threatens to become boring to the writer and audience alike until a fire alarm sends Herbert Gage off to help fight the blaze.

The fun doesn't begin, however, until Jonathan and Mathilda Rockwood plop into the house. It seems it was their home originally and they had been away for six years. A clause in the deed permitted them to return when they pleased—and it didn't please the Gages. Mrs. Gage knew about the clause, before buying the house, and tossed the information to her husband while he was under a shower. A lawyer is dragged in, but the Gages, realizing their case is hopeless, accept the situation, even when the Rockwoods' shiftless son joins his parents.

The loudest laughs are touched off during the scene that finds the freezing Gages sharing a box of corn flakes at the breakfast table while the Rockwoods live in comfort and plenty in the next room. There's a bit of excitement when the Gages' daughter and the Rockwoods' son disappear for several hours. They return with proper explanations, the girl falls back into the waiting arms of her sweetheart, now a civilian, and the Gages, yielding to the tempting fragrance of bacon and coffee, share the Rockwood bounty and the warmth of good fellowship soon pervades the room.

Bacon and Ham Supply

There is a good performance by Charles Middleton as Jonathan Rockwood, the wry-necked farmer whose Republicanism makes him contemptuous of all Democrats—and of course the Gages had voted for the New Deal. Also noteworthy is the acting of Helen Carey as his pious wife. Robert Keith as Herbert Gage and Lulu Mae Hubbard as his wife could extract more laughs from their lines, but the fault, we thought, rests with Ezra Stone's direction. A few other characters are tossed in; they add little to the play, except the small part furnished by Charles Burrows as the cherubic Uncle Walter, an old friend of the Rockwoods.

"January Thaw" should freeze solidly into the hit class. And if it does, the two little porkers that make a brief appearance are likely to be a future source of lots of the bacon and ham that are toted so appetizingly across the stage.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

By Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

Corn Off the Todd

A CITY slicker learns a thing or two from country folk in "January Thaw," and so it is possibly appropriate that the corn is currently growing pretty tall on the Golden stage. William Roos's new comedy puts a town family and farm family together in a made-over Connecticut farmhouse and tries to make their characteristics look amusing in conflict. The fellers from the big city nearly freeze to death trying to burn green wood in winter in their part of the house, and there are just loads of jokes about privies and pregnancies in case you don't get the subtler points, by cracky. In fact, the script is so fully laden with its crop of yellow ears that it would take more than mere actors to lift it into a play.

* * *

The situation begins when an author finds that the property deed to the country home he has bought contains a clause allowing the farmers who once owned it to live there until they die. They have been missing for years, of course, but the inevitable happens; and the tillers of the soil turn up in homespun clothing and with homespun singleness of purpose. The play stops here, and the void between the beginning and the end is only fractionally filled with a labored war between the two backgrounds. It is for the most part an actionless struggle with the two contestants insulting one another about plumbing, furniture, Republicans, Democrats and central heating. Since the comments are both obvious and witless, there is very little in this Michael Todd production that can pass for entertainment.

* * *

Robert Keith labors like Hercules as the author who tries to glare the unwelcome visitors out of his home. His comedy timing is impeccable, but he almost never gets a helping hand from his material. Charles Middleton is a gaunt caricature of the staunch New England type, and Charles Burrows does a good bit as a doddering old gossip. Lulu Mae Hubbard and Helen Carew fill in as representatives of town and country wives. The Ezra Stone staging points up the leaden gags and occasionally stops the normal flow of movement for them, a treatment which they certainly do not merit. For all its laughing behind the hand at human peculiarities, "January Thaw" is something of a February comedy freeze.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

Faulty Deed

This apparently being the winter of his grand offensive against our town, the hustling Michael Todd turned up last night at the Golden Theatre with "January Thaw," his third production within the last two months. Since grand offensives, no matter how well they are planned, frequently have their faltering moments, mark this one down as one of those unfortunate moments.

To be sure, the idea of city folks moving into the country and renovating ancient homesteads has long been deemed comic by our playwrights and novelists. And Bellamy Partridge, in his novel, from which this play has been made, found something from which to fashion his successful book of the same name. But whatever it was that persuaded the nation's novel-reading public to elevate Mr. Partridge's novel to the best-seller lists seems to have been lost in that treacherous journey from book covers to boards.

For those who are unfamiliar with the book, this is a story of an urban couple who purchase a Connecticut farm in spite of its "flawed" title. It seems that the original owners have been long absent and hence believed dead. They, of course, are far from that and naturally return. With a solid claim to their home, they move in with the newcomers, pit their rustic wisdom against the hearsay leaning of the city slickers and enjoy the last laugh. In proper course the "thaw" sets in and the union of slickers and bumpkins is completed.

In this contrived set-up there might be enough for an evening's fun. But William Roos has not been too successful in his adaptation. Although he has managed to recapture some of the humor in spots, he has on the whole produced a thin little comedy. The situations are weak, and it is about time it became evident that clown effects and noisy expostulations are not sufficient to make for sustained laughter. There is too much dependence on jokes about Republicans and Democrats without the necessary sharp edge; too much dependence on jokes about the merits of indoor and outdoor plumbing. And the double entendre, ensuing from a suspected elopment, is not much help.

Robert Keith and Lulu Mae Hubbard are the city couple, and do as well as their material permits. The best interludes belong to Charles Middleton, Helen Carew and Charles Burrows, who are the farm folk. Ezra Stone directed and the one-room setting by Watson Barratt is correct. L. B. F.

Journal American

FEBRUARY 5, 1946

'January Thaw' Opens at Golden

By JIM O'CONNOR

Not being able to go any place else, "January Thaw" came to Broadway last night and settled in the John Golden Theatre. That, at least, was the explanation of Producer Michael Todd's representatives for the sudden appearance of the play in New York.

Boston had given "January Thaw" a cool reception about three weeks ago. Newark, however, warmed up to it last week. Unable to book another house on the road, Todd promptly brought his comedy here.

Which may be a "break" for Wilmington, Philadelphia, New Haven and other try-out cities. For, truth to tell, "January Thaw," as seen on a cold February night, is not so hot.

"January Thaw" is no frost, either. It has its moments. But not enough of them to roll up a rousing hit.

All the fun in the play is caused by the housing shortage.

Mrs. Marge Gage (Lulu Mae Hubbard), New York matron, buys an old farm house in Connecticut and redecorates it. She thought it had been abandoned. Her husband, Herbert (Robert Keith), an author, goes along with the idea. So do their grown daughter and two younger children.

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Housing Trouble

Back come the original owners of the house, Jonathan and Mathilda Rockwood (Charles Middleton and Helen Carew), after an absence of several years. They move in, claiming certain property rights. Their son, Matt, returns, too.

The Rockwoods are New Englanders, farmers, Republicans. The Gages are New Yorkers, professional people, Democrats.

You can well imagine the usual complications. Bellamy Partridge did and wrote a novel about them. William Roos did and made a play about them.

Most of the humor is broad and much of it forced. As a comedy, it's largely a farce.

Also, "January Thaw" is as full of "corn" as a silo. In fact, when the play is at its best, you can hear the "corn" popping all over the stage. Personally, I like "corn." But it has to be well done.

This is not to say there's a shortage of laughs in the Golden Theatre. There are plenty of them—some of the belly variety. But they just don't seem to add up.

Hollywood Wins

Acting honors, if such they be called, go to Charles Middleton, of the Hollywood school of emoting, for his portrayal of Jonathan Rockwood, the taciturn Yank.

Charles Burrows built his bit part of Uncle Walter into the brightest part of the evening.

As George Husted, John Hudson was acceptable. But as Matt Rockwood, the farmer's son, Irving Morrow was miscast. The balance of the cast played their stock character roles in a typical manner. The direction of Ezra Stone was not of the best.

Frequently amusing, the best bit was the breakfast scene in the third act—which is also the best act. Most authentic touch: the way Robert Keith operates a typewriter on stage. The single setting by Watson Barratt was good.

In time for the final curtain came the thaw in strained relations. The feuding families of the Gages and Rockwoods made up, 'Cause folks is folks, as I always say.

"January Thaw" is no "Winter's Tale" nor a "Day Before Spring." It may last a spell. But it seems to be resting on thin ice.